

XBOX 360: 18 FACE-MELTING GAMES FOR 2009

GAMEPRO

HALO 2009

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Xbox 360 guide p.44!**

Issue 245 / FEB 09

THEIR WORLD, HIS RULES

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TRACKS FROM 50 CENT AND G-UNIT

"A LOUD SHINY PARADE OF GUN
VIOLENCE AND RAP MUSIC."

- GAMESPOT

"THERE IS HARDLY EVER A MOMENT WHEN
SOMETHING (OR SOMEONE) ISN'T BLOWING UP"

- MTV NEWS



Fast-Paced Action Shooter



Brutal Melee Counterkills



Co-op Online Multiplayer

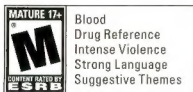


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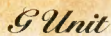


**50
CENT**

Blood on the sand



IN STORES FEBRUARY 2009



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GAMEPRO

★ Features

Class of 2009

44 Xbox 360: Class of 2009

The Xbox 360 is the king amongst the hardware, and 2009 looks to be its biggest year yet. We've got previews of 18 of the biggest titles coming next year including the GTAIV expansion, Splatterhouse, Watchmen, and the epic return of Halo with *Halo Wars* and *Halo 3: ODST*.



★ Departments

Spawn Point

19



20 Editors' Choice 2008

The *GamePro* editors take a look back at 2008 and select their favorite games in a wide variety of categories. Were your favorites selected?

24 The 6 Best RPGs

World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy VII, Fallout 3, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time are four of our six favorite RPGs. Check out the full list!



23 Mortal Kombat Secrets

Ed Boon talks about the successes (and trials) of the new Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe, and the future of the franchise.

28 iPhone Games

With over 170 million iPod products out there, it's easy to get overwhelmed, so we selected nine gems for the iPhone and iPod Touch.

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The Series That Won't Die

Pop quiz! What's the most-played game on Xbox Live as of December 2008? If you said "Halo 3," you win a gold star. Though games like Call of Duty 4 and Grand Theft Auto IV sold far more copies than Halo 3, Bungie's shooter masterpiece is still the most popular online Xbox 360 game—over 16 months since its release. I'm a huge Halo fan, and even I'm shocked by this series' staying power. Hence this month's issue, which is dedicated entirely to the ever-growing Halo phenomenon. Be sure to read the full article for exquisite new details on Ensemble Studios' increasingly impressive Halo Wars, as well as new clues on Bungie's ambitious Halo 3: ODST expansion. If you love Halo, this issue is for you.

Then there's the Xbox 360, the little game console that could. Despite crippling problems with the Red Ring of Death—a hardware flaw that would have outright destroyed a lesser console manufacturer—it's becoming increasingly obvious that the Xbox 360 is the console of choice in North America. The Xbox 360 might not be as powerful or as all-encompassing as the PlayStation 3, but it's held its own remarkably well. Be sure to check out the *GamePro* editors' 18 favorite Xbox 360 games for 2009 on page 44.

Finally, this month we say goodbye to *GamePro* senior editor and *South Park* line-quoter Chris Morell as he joins Sony Computer Entertainment's social media division. Don't feel bad for Chris, because I'm pretty sure he's making way more money than I am now. In all seriousness, I couldn't have asked for a better partner and friend than Chris. He was the calm, collected one in the office (I'm the frantic one) and his talents (and cartoon quotes) will be missed immensely. Chris isn't gone from the Internet, though—you can go poster him on the PlayStation Blog. Just be sure to tell him that the Lakers and Dodgers suck.

Thanks for joining us. As always, *GamePro* remains your magazine.

Sid Shuman
Senior Editor
Sid_shuman@gamepro.com

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PLAYSTATION 3

PlayStation 2

PSP
PlayStation Portable

XBOX 360

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XBOX

Wii

NINTENDO
GAMECUBE

NINTENDO DS

GAME BOY ADVANCE



The physics in *Ghostbusters* is so impressive, you can blast individual pages off book golems until there's nothing but charred literature left.

▼ **GHOSTBUSTERS** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC



▼ **QUANTUM OF SOLACE** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC



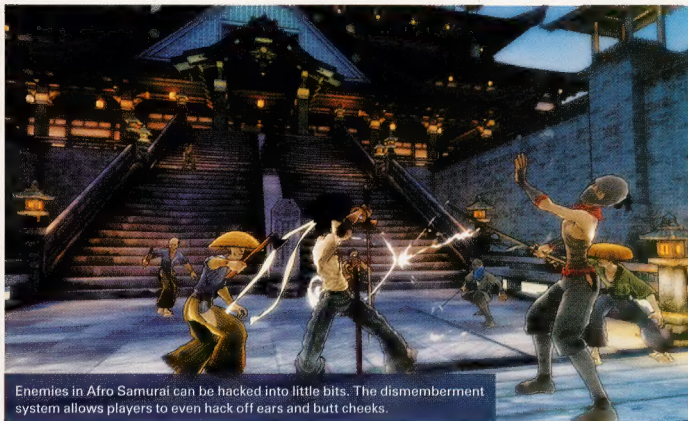
▼ **CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR** PS3, Xbox 360, PC



This screen shot is borderline not safe for work, or the eyes of young children. Check out how Bayonetta uses her dark magic to shift her hair and outfit into a weapon, leaving her a bit vulnerable.



▼ **BAYONETTA** PS3, Xbox 360

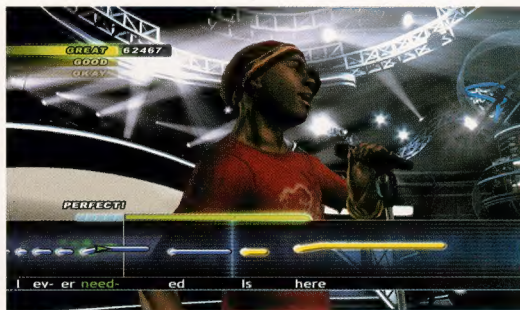


Enemies in Afro Samurai can be hacked into little bits. The dismemberment system allows players to even hack off ears and butt cheeks.

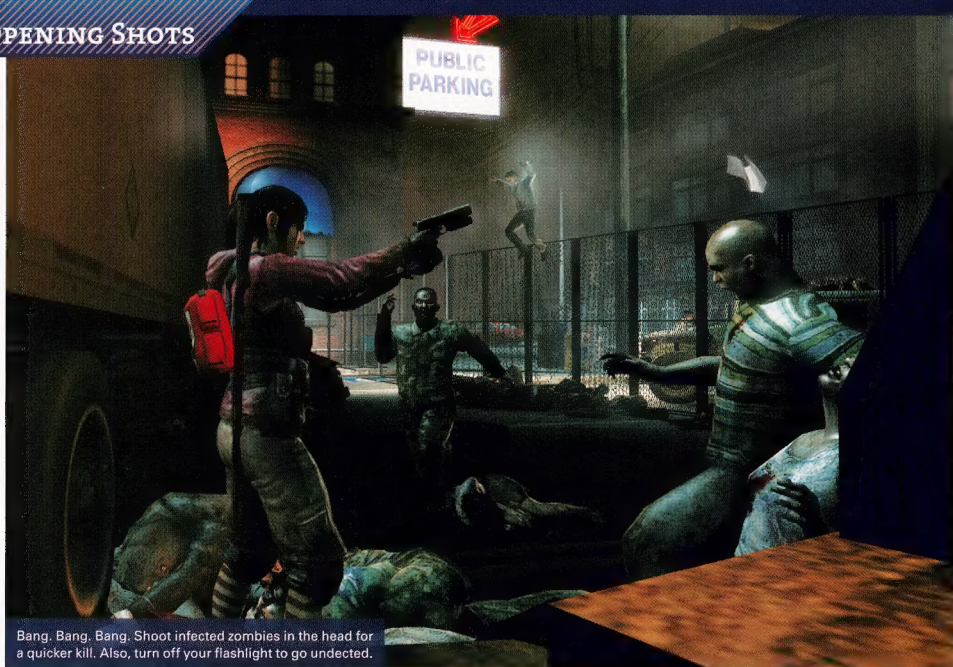
▼ **AFRO SAMURAI** PS3, Xbox 360



▼ **PRINCE OF PERSIA** PS3, Xbox 360, PC



▼ **KARAOKE REVOLUTION PRESENTS: AMERICAN IDOL ENCORE** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii



Bang. Bang. Bang. Shoot infected zombies in the head for a quicker kill. Also, turn off your flashlight to go undetected.

▼ **LEFT 4 DEAD** Xbox 360, PC



▼ **SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC



▼ **TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X** PS3, Xbox 360, PC



▼ **RACE PRO** Xbox 360



▼ **MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE** PS3, Xbox 360



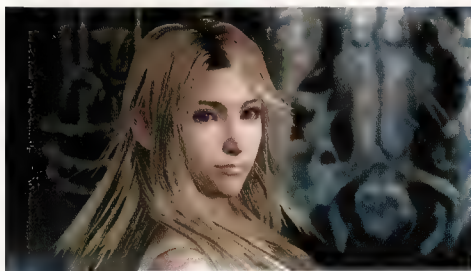
▼ SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX PS3 XBOX360



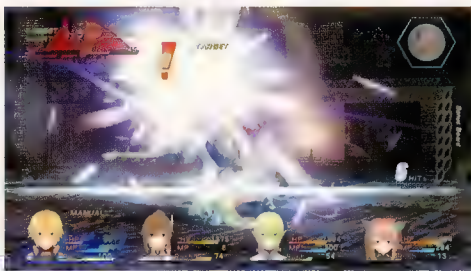
▼ WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING PC



▼ 50 CENT: BLOOD ON THE SAND PS3 XBOX360



▼ FINAL FANTASY VERSUS XIII PS3



▼ STAR OCEAN: THE LAST HOPE PS3 XBOX360

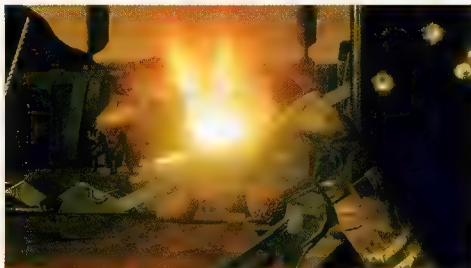


Ayumi is going to give sex-pot Bayonetta a run for her money in the scantily clad heroine department. At least she brought sharp swords and magic to the fight.

X-BLADES PS3, Xbox 360, PC



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: MINES OF MORIA PC



RED FACTION: GUERRILLA PS3, Xbox 360, PC



The monstrously huge crocodiles in *Resident Evil 5* don't mess around. They'll eat you alive before you even see them creeping up on you.

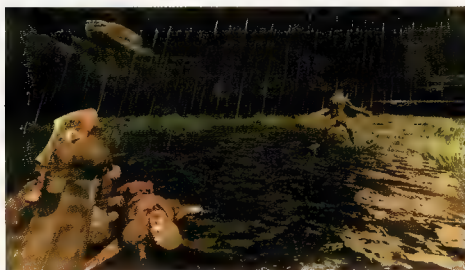
RESIDENT EVIL 5 PS3, Xbox 360



▼ **THE SIMS 3** PC



▼ **Wii SPORTS RESORT** Wii



▼ **EDGE OF TWILIGHT** PS3, XBOX 360, PC



▼ **THE 3RD BIRTHDAY** PSP



The original Wolfenstein pioneered and defined the first-person shooter action genre.

▼ **WOLFENSTEIN** PS1, XBOX 360, PC



You knew this would happen; what's next—a NASCAR fighting game?

▼ NASCAR KART RACING Wii



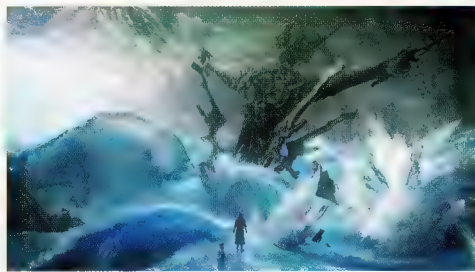
▼ MARTIAN PANIC Wii



▼ THINGS ON WHEELS Xbox 360



▼ NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM PS3



▼ FINAL FANTASY XIII PS3/Xbox 360

Chris Brown is captured in a dynamic, mid-air pose, wearing a white tank top, grey pants, and black sneakers. He is smiling and looking towards the camera, with his arms extended and legs spread wide. The background is dark and textured.

got milk?

Chris Brown feat. Milk.
Another great collaboration?
Milk. Some studies suggest
that teens who drink milk tend
to be leaner and the protein
helps build muscle. So eat
right, exercise and drink lowfat
or fat free milk. Talk about
a smooth move.

body  milk

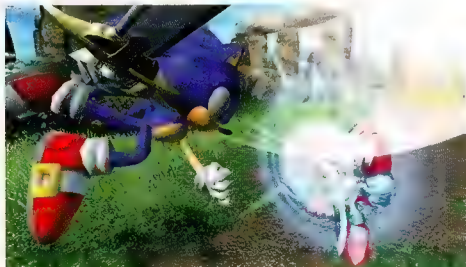
www.bodybymilk.com

OPENING SHOTS

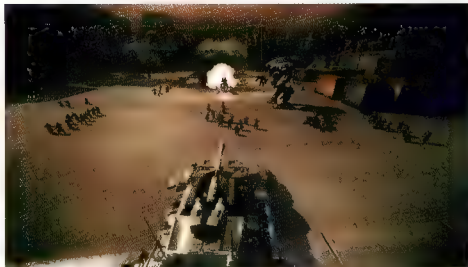


Wannabe World War II dogfighters rejoice: Over 40 classic planes await, with battles presented in full HD.

▼ **HEROES OVER EUROPE** PS3, Xbox 360, PC



▼ **SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT** Wii



▼ **STORMRISE** PS3, Xbox 360



Swinging is a major component to Bionic Commando. Master this technique and the game opens up in a whole new way.

▼ **BIONIC COMMANDO** PS3, Xbox 360, PC

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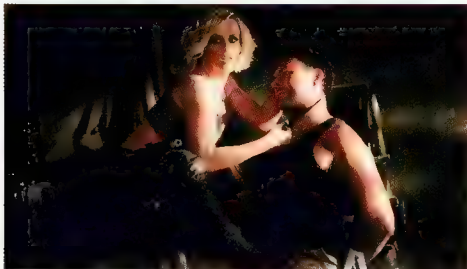
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ARMY RESERVE

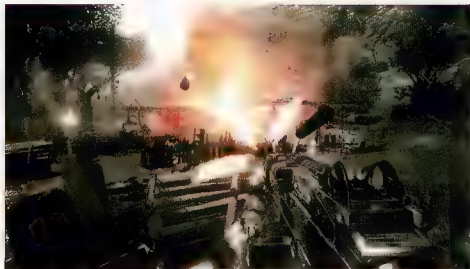


U.S. ARMY

ARMY STRONG.



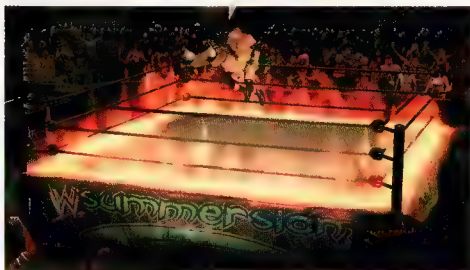
▼ **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3** Xbox 360, PC



▼ **FAR CRY 2** PS3, Xbox 360, PC



▼ **BIG LEAGUE SPORTS** Wii



▼ **WWE SMACKDOWN vs. RAW 2009** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PSP



A real-time strategy game, Cold War pits Soviet forces against NATO during the Berlin Blockade.

▼ **CODENAME: PANZERS—COLD WAR** PS3, Xbox 360, PC

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LONG
YEARS...
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SPAWN POINT

GAMES, GOSSIP, GEAR.

INSIDE SPAWN POINT

GamePro Editors' Choice 2008 ... Page 20

Ed Boon on Mortal Kombat ... Page 23

The 6 Best RPGs ... Page 24

iPhone Games ... Page 29

KILLTACULAR

Killzone 2 could be the game that cements Bungie's status as one of the best developers in the industry. With a gorgeous single-player campaign and a ton of content, the game is a must-play for all shooters. It's the best of 2009. Here's why. —Chris Moore

MIND-BLOWING GRAPHICS

Killzone 2 channels *Call of War 2* and *Call of Duty* with a more...
...to present the... world of...
...stunner for the PS3, the... achievement do...
...with the solo campaign... most shooters do—multiplayer...
...y bit... good, making online fraggling a visual pleasure.

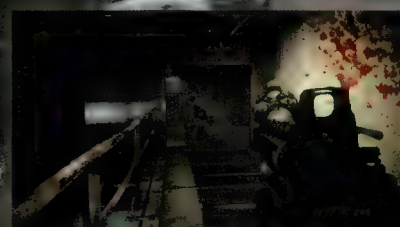
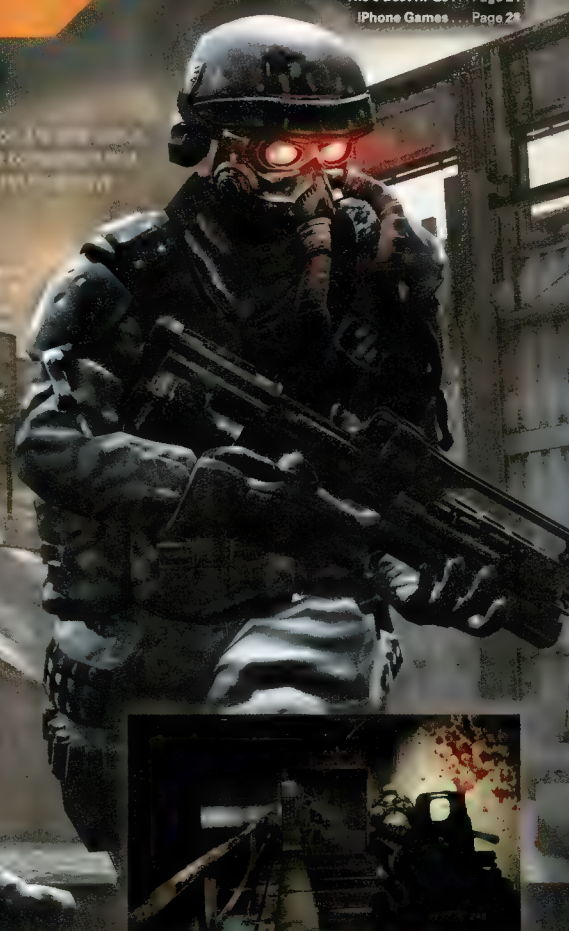
MULTIPLAYER AMBITION

Without a doubt, *Killzone 2* is the most ambitious online experience you're going to get this year. A 32-player (max) class-based experience, players can mix and match abilities, form squads, factions, and clans, and customize their avatars to their heart's desire.

KILLZONE.COM

Take Halo's Bungie.net up a notch, and you've got Killzone.com. It's the complete complement to the game, offering statistics, leaderboards, videos, and total profile customization. If you're going to be playing *Killzone 2* this year, Killzone.com will only enhance your experience.

Check out more exclusive details on Page 20.





Best Games of 2008

With so many fantastic and innovative games, it's tough the pin down the best of the year, but the editorial staff at *GamePro* has spoken. Here are the Editors' Choice winners for 2008! Can't get enough awards? Check out the expanded Editors' Choice Awards on *GamePro.com*!



Console of the Year

Xbox 360

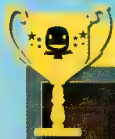
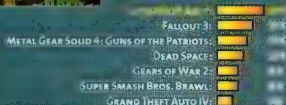
For the second year running, the Xbox 360 is the king of consoles. Barely edging out the impressive PS3, the swanky new dash and the amazing exclusives like *Gears of War 2* and *Fable 2* put Microsoft over the top. The Wii's casual focus didn't garner it any votes this year.



Game of the Year

LittleBigPlanet (PS3)

Creativity trumps carnage. Despite the deluge of ultra-violent shooters, our favorite game this year was the user-fueled platforming fun of *LittleBigPlanet*.



PlayStation 3 Game of the Year

LittleBigPlanet

It turns out *LittleBigPlanet* had a tougher time amongst the tighter crop of PS3 titles. The new-gen debut of Solid Snake in *Metal Gear Solid 4* truly impressed us, but it couldn't quite match the amazing innovation offered by Sony's new platformer.



Xbox 360 Game of the Year

Dead Space

The multiplatform title *Dead Space* won a squeaker for the Xbox 360's best game. The Resident Evil-esque shooter felt the most natural on Microsoft's shooter-friendly system. *Gears of War 2* gave a valiant effort but fell just short of winning.



Wii Game of the Year

No More Heroes

Here's a telling sign of the Wii's fortunes of late: all of the vote-receivers were released before June. The winner, by a large margin, was Ubisoft's M-rated action-slasher *No More Heroes*. We can't wait for the sequel (previewed in this issue).



PC Game of the Year

Fallout 3

Spore put up a great effort, but our voting ended up with a tie between multiplatform titles *Call of Duty: World at War* and *Fallout 3*. Ultimately, *Fallout 3*'s PC roots pushed it over the top, as the title took the tie-breaker vote.



★ Portable Game of the Year



Patapon (PSP)

This hasn't been the best year for portable systems, but there were a few bright spots. The PSP, surprisingly, garnered 75 percent of the vote, with Patapon almost carrying a majority of the votes.

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS (PSP)
CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECLIPSE (PSP)
FINAL FANTASY IV (DS)
GUITAR HERO: ON TOUR (DS)

★ Downloadable Game of the Year

Mega Man 9

Capcom had a stellar year in the downloadable realm, taking over 50 percent of the vote with its three retro revivals. Ultimately, the NES-style goodness of Mega Man 9 edged out the modern HD beauty of Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix.

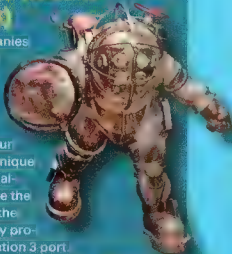


SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX
BRAND
PIXELJUNK EDEN
GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2
PIXELJUNK MONSTERS
BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED
PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES

★ Best Downloadable Content

Challenge Rooms (BioShock)

Too many companies have angered us of late by charging for content that should have been free (ahem, Soulcalibur V). BioShock's unique and enjoyable challenge rooms were the cherry on top of the game's extremely professional PlayStation 3 port.



SOLD PACK ADD-ON (SUPER STARDUST HD)
FOO FIGHTERS: THE COLOR AND THE SHAPE (ROCK BAND)

★ Best New Weapon



Ripper (Dead Space)

This one wasn't even close. Taking cues from Gears of War's epic chainsaw bayonet, Dead Space's Ripper shot razor blades at alien limbs, and smiles onto our faces.

REAM KATANA (NO MORE HEROES)

★ Best New Character

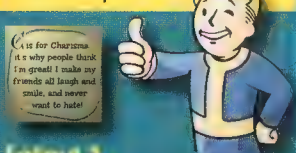


Sackboy (LittleBigPlanet)

Talk about your lopsided victories. There's a reason Sony's adopted Sackboy as its mascot—it's cute as the dickens. The other vote-getter, geeky badass Travis Touchdown, couldn't even compete.

TRAVIS TOUCHDOWN (NO MORE HEROES)

★ Best Story

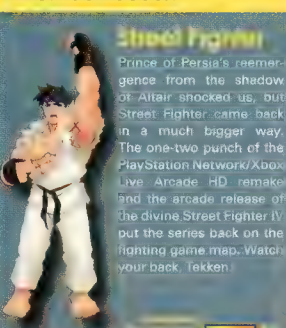


Fallout 3

Give Metal Gear Solid 4 credit—it tied up the many loose ends and complicated twists presented in the previous three titles. We gave the award to Fallout 3, though, since it did what a sequel should and told a great standalone story that caters to series newbies and vets alike.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
DEAD SPACE
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

★ Best Comeback



Street Fighter

Prince of Persia's reemergence from the shadow of Altair shocked us, but Street Fighter came back in a much bigger way. The one-two punch of the PlayStation Network/Xbox Live Arcade HD remakes and the arcade release of the divine Street Fighter IV put the series back on the fighting game map. Watch your back, Tekken!

PRINCE OF PERSIA
MEGA MAN 9

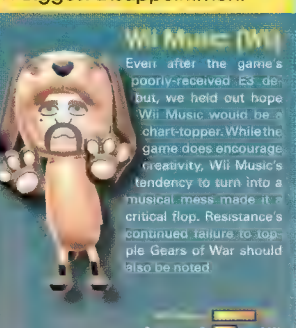
★ Biggest Risk Taker



A 2D platformer powered by the creativity of gamers isn't the usual MO for Sony, creators of God of War and Resistance, but LittleBigPlanet won us over. Nintendo had a creative megahit in Wii Fit, but in the end, Sony beat out the most creative company in gaming: Kudos, Sony.

NINTENDO (WII FIT)
CAPCOM (MEGA MAN 9)

★ Biggest Disappointment



Wii Music (Wii)

Ever after the game's poorly-received E3 demo, we held out hope Wii Music would be a chart-topper. While the game does encourage creativity, Wii Music's tendency to turn into a musical mess made it a critical flop. Resistance's continued failure to topple Gears of War should also be noted.

RESISTANCE 2
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERCOVER
RESISTANCE 2

COMPARISON: ENTERTAINMENT

PS3 vs. Xbox 360 vs. Wii

The new Xbox 360 dashboard remodeled the clutter-y old menu system of old, adding virtual avatars and more. But where does it stand against the PS3 XrossMediaBar and the channel-based Wii menu? We compare the big three.

CATEGORY	PS3 XROSSMEDIABAR	NEXT XBOX EXPERIENCE	Wii MENU
CUTTING-EDGE TRACKS	Yes	Yes	No 
WIRELESS AVATARS	SOON, VIA HOME	Yes 	Yes
ARCade GAME PLAY FRAMES	\$3 - \$40	FREE - \$20	\$5 - \$15
COMPARISON TO THE ORIGINAL	SOME	Yes	No 
LOWEST COST	PSP 	iPOD COVER FLOW	iPHONE ICONS
ARCade GAME PLAY FRAMES	ARCADE, PLAYSTATION, PSP	ARCADE, XBOX	ARCADE, MOST NINTENDO SYSTEMS, GENESIS, NEO-GEO, AND MORE
HIT MOVIE OFFERS	RENT OR BUY	RENT OR STREAM VIA NETFLIX	NONE 
NETFLIX WATCHES	IN-GAME ACCESS	NETFLIX 	MII AVATARS

SUCKS OR RULES

Changing the world, one insult at a time

SUCKS

LittleBigPlanet: Sure, the game's fantastic, but it's hard to buy Sony's commitment to supporting user-created content when they ban inoffensive levels with no warning or recourse. Would it kill them to at least offer a simple explanation when they break out the ban hammer? **SUCKS**

Xbox Live PrimeTime: Microsoft's virtual game show has been delayed for months, supposedly to avoid problems deploying the Xbox 360's new menu system. We call shenanigans: what's the real story? **SUCKS**

Heroes game: Okay, season three has sucked pretty horribly so far, but we were still excited to try on some superpowers in Ubisoft's game. Until they canceled it because of declining ratings, that is. **SUCKS**

RULES

New Xbox Live Experience: The Xbox 360's new menu system does more than just offer awesome Netflix support and better-than-the-Wii avatars: it makes the whole system friendlier and easier to use, from top to bottom. **RULES**

Valve Bargain: Valve has made good on their promise to pass publishing pipeline savings on to Steam users: \$99 now buys you their entire 22 game library, including the recently released Left 4 Dead. Sweet! **RULES**

Pre-release Beta: 3DCOM: Confrontation, Resistance 2, and LittleBigPlanet had closed betas you could win access to, and Call of Duty: World at War's went completely public before the game launched. This is one trend we love to bits. **RULES**

What's **your** opinion?
Vote for yourself on SucksorRules.com

OMG movies

MOVIES FOR GAMERS



MUST SEE

CASABLANCA (ULTIMATE COLLECTOR'S EDITION)

"I'm shocked!" It doesn't get much better than Bogart and Bergman, and this classic 1942 film won three Academy Awards for Best Picture, Director, and Screenplay. *Casablanca* makes its Blu-ray debut with tons of extras. In addition to a re-mastered film print, the Ultimate Collector's Edition features a commentary by Roger Ebert, documentaries, outtakes, trailers, a 48-page photo book, 10 one-sheet reproduction cards, and more. warnervideo.com
\$64.98 (Blu-ray); \$69.98 (DVD)

THE DARK KNIGHT

The ambitious and tension-filled sequel to *Batman Begins* explores the shadowy hinterlands between right and wrong, and features a memorably textured performance by the late Heath Ledger as The Joker. warnervideo.com
\$35.99 (Blu-ray); \$34.99 (DVD)

GENERATION KILL

Based on an embedded *Falling Stone* reporter's experiences during the ongoing war in Iraq, this absorbing and expertly crafted seven episode miniseries from the creators of *The Wire* is by turns harrowing, poignant, and darkly funny. nbs.com/generationkill
\$59.99 (DVD)

WALL-E

Pixar's latest epic is an endearing and masterful social commentary that just happens to be adorable, hilarious and an absolute blast for viewers of all ages. In the near future, the human race has left the earth behind for greener pastures (no pun intended), only to leave behind a tiny, curious sanitation robot all on his lonesome. It's not long before this delightful bot finds himself entangled in an outrageous adventure that may be the salvation of our once green planet. disneydvd.disney.go.com
\$40.99 (Blu-ray); \$39.99 (DVD)

THE SECRETS OF MORTAL KOMBAT



In a rare interview, Mortal Kombat co-creator Ed Boon talks about the successes (and trials) the new Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe, and what may become of Mortal Kombat 8...and the third MK movie!—Sid Shuman



GamePro: For a Teen-rated game, Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe is a pretty damned violent. How has the development team had to work with the ESRB to earn that Teen rating you were after?

Ed Boon: Multiple submissions. We submitted [MK vs. DC to the ESRB] at least three times. We even submitted once or twice, unofficially, to see what the ESRB thought stood out. We wanted to keep as much of the feel of Mortal Kombat as possible, without watering it down.

GP: What has the reaction been to MK vs. DC, from the loyal, old-school MK fans?

EB: To be blunt, the initial reaction was pretty negative. DC is known to be a little more of a boy scout, clean-cut label. So we made the announcement for MK vs. DC, posted a quick teaser video, and gave no information. Everybody assumed that a Teen rating meant no blood and no fatalities. But once we started releasing gameplay videos, and letting folks play, we saw a complete turnaround. It seems to me that the feedback is about 90 percent positive now.

GP: There must have been a few MK or DC characters you wished you could have included but didn't. Who were they?

EB: From the MK side, Kung Lao and Reptile. From the DC side, we had a lot of debates. Some people wanted Lobo in the game...a staff member wanted Aquaman, and now he feels it would have been a mistake. We also considered the Martian Manhunter, Green Arrow, and so on. But we looked at the game as a "greatest hits" lineup for both MK and DC.

GP: Did you ever think of using Dr. Manhattan or Rorschach from *Watchmen*? I understand DC owns the rights to *Watchmen*...

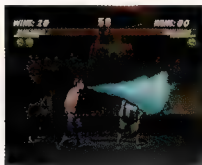
EB: I remember that it came up. There were characters who DC deemed off-limits. DC also said things like, "Your Batman can't look like the *Dark Knight* movie, and you can't make your Joker look like Heath Ledger." So there were certain things that DC wanted to keep separate from the movies.

GP: We've heard reports of a super-mature, redesigned Mortal Kombat 8 that was underway before MK vs. DC came into existence. Is MK8 still gestating? Will you re-visit that idea down the line?

EB: Absolutely. I don't think we've seen the last Mature-rated Mortal Kombat game. I do think that MK vs. DC is a potential opportunity for a new series—I'd love to do MK vs. Marvel, or even MK vs. Street Fighter, though that would be a tough one. Or MK vs. Tekken or Dead or Alive...to me, those would be great ideas.

GP: And whatever happened to that third Mortal Kombat movie?

EB: I've been sent like five scripts so far, and we've gone back and forth with them. I know that it's in some kind of production, though they haven't shot yet. The script exists, I've read it and commented upon it. It's kind of just...plodding along.



eneloop

Presents:



1 WORLD OF WARCRAFT EXPANSION LANDS

Wrath of the Lich King finally hit stores here and abroad. Huge crowds lined up for midnight launch events, and at least one retailer's overstressed credit card system took a temporary dive.

THE VERDICT: With over 11 million players swarming all over Azeroth, Blizzard might as well start printing its own currency at this point. Too bad the new Death Knight class doesn't have a more interesting story to follow.

2 EA SLASHES STAFF

After losing a staggering \$310 million in a single quarter, and acknowledging the current dismal economic climate, Electronic Arts ditched its casual games division, and laid off 540 employees.

THE VERDICT: Insiders have known EA was in trouble for some time, but the publisher's track record for quality releases has actually been improving. The casual label closure is likely the first in a series of big changes.

3 DS SALES SURPASS GBA

Nintendo's dual-screen device has sold over 84 million units, making it the gaming giant's second most successful handheld platform behind the original Game Boy.

THE VERDICT: With Sony's tepid PSP library offering little in the way of competition, and Nintendo's penchant for releasing regular updates of the same basic hardware, expect the Game Boy's 119 million sales record eventually to fall.

4 ESRB UPDATES RATINGS SYSTEM

The Entertainment Software Ratings Board has added summaries to their ratings, thus offering parents more information about each title they might choose to allow their children to play.

THE VERDICT: Useful? Certainly. Likely to keep pandering politicians from their habitual grandstanding about the supposed inherent evils of the young medium? Hardly.

5 FALLOUT 3 SHIPS 4.7 MILLION

Bethesda Softworks announced its sprawling post-apocalyptic romp has shipped almost five million copies since launch. When they all sell through, that'll equal almost \$300 million in sales.

THE VERDICT: Releasing shipping numbers is always a little disingenuous, but smart retailers know that word of mouth and downloadable expansion possibilities are going to keep this outstanding title selling for a good long time.

THE 6 BEST RPGS

BEHOLD AS WE COUNT DOWN THE SIX GREATEST ROLE-PLAYING GAMES EVER CREATED. FROM CHRONO TRIGGER TO FALLOUT 3. HERE ARE THE ONES EVERY ONE SHOULD PLAY.



DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION

Though not a full-blown RPG, *Diablo II*'s hack-n-slash adventure makes our list. Why? Because it's an insanely fun game that weaves in RPG elements. *Diablo II* set new standards in online cooperative play, enabling up to eight players to battle the hordes of Hell together. It's the most action-oriented RPG title on this list, but *Diablo II* is a monstrous innovator with lasting appeal.



CHRONO TRIGGER

Role-playing games were a vast source of wealth for the Super Nintendo, but few could match the charm and wonder of *Chrono Trigger*. From the optional side stories starring the likes of Frog, Lucca, and Robo, to the unprecedented amount of alternate endings, *Chrono Trigger* was an RPG that warranted months of playtime, with each story becoming a little different.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Love it or hate it, *World of Warcraft* has become a cultural phenomenon in ways that its MMO predecessors like *EverQuest* and *Dark Age of Camelot* could only dream of being. And with its user base recently passing the 11 million mark, there is no sign of Blizzard's money-printing juggernaut going away in the foreseeable future.



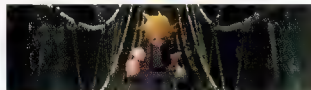
FALLOUT 3

The *Fallout* franchise has always been known for its incredibly in-depth style of play, fantastical character customization, and, of course, trademark sense of humor. All of these aspects have been cranked up to "11" for *Fallout 3*, an amazing adventure through the Capitol Wastelands of post-apocalyptic Washington by the team that brought you the *Elder Scroll* series. Deeper, bigger, and better than ever, *Fallout 3* has already carved out its niche in RPG history.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

With four 3D console iterations of *The Legend of Zelda*, it's surprising that the first is still considered the best by many. Nintendo did a masterful job of keeping the grandeur and spirit of the series alive while creating a great new game engine. The one thing that's missing? The classic overworld theme, which wasn't redone until *Majora's Mask*.



FINAL FANTASY VII

Final Fantasy VII is one of the most important role-playing games of all time. It proved that RPGs don't have to be medieval-set tales of lore, nor do they have to read like children's bedtime stories. *FFVII* featured mature themes in a modern industrial setting and both fit the RPG genre like a glove. *Final Fantasy VII* redefined the RPG and brought the genre to the masses.

Versus Mode

Two classic characters, one classic brawl.



James Bond (Quantum of Solace)

Employment: Licensed to kill for the British MI6 intelligence service.
Skills: Expert use of high-impact firearms.
Tactics: Skillful use of cover keep his tux from getting perforated.
Athletic Prowess: Prefers stomping across flat ground.
Personal Style: Prefers immaculately tailored suits.

Faith (Mirror's Edge)

Skills: Delivers private messages in a surveillance-obsessed dystopia.
Attuned vision lets her take advantage of environmental obstacles.
Neutralizes armed threats with rapid advancement and quick kicks.
Master of parkour, from shimmying pipes to wall-runs and long jumps.
Stylish work-out gear, including a distinctive set of sneakers.

OUTCOME:

007 was once a master of battlefield improvisation, but his current obsession with heavy artillery leaves him less flexible. As he unleashes torrents of bullets at the blurred figure that races toward him in fits and starts, the dust kicked up by ricochets and near-misses comes to look more like a human comet trail than a genuine threat to his lean quarry's safety. When Faith hears

the tell-tale clinkety-clack of Bond's poorly-timed attempt to reload, she springs on the agent with the grace of a leopard, strips him of his firearm, and snaps his neck like a popsicle stick.

DECISION: Faith >>>





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THE COLD WAR

The weather experts have been predicting an especially cold and harsh winter this year. Here are some offbeat ideas for shivering your way through to spring.—Cameron Lewis



WAR(MTH) IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

Yeah, we know it's a logistical nightmare trying to get seven friends to bring their Xbox 360s and spare televisions to your house, let alone run all that hardware without frying your fuse box. On the other hand, each overheated happy white brick doubles as a space heater, which should make your living room the warmest in the county. Finally you won't have to play Call of Duty: World at War with mittens.

CAUTION HOT



GET ON YOUR FEET

When your body's at rest, your heart rate drops, and twiddling your thumbs hardly counts as exercise. If you've got a Wii, put your heart and soul into every slice and twist of the remote. If you're playing some FPS or platformer on the Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, mimic every on-screen movement, from running to jumping. Give that butt-print in the couch time to heal, and warm yourself up in the process.



WITCH'S BREWS

A cold drink in the winter is about as appealing as slamming your foot in a car door, but a little experimentation could yield some surprising new favorites. Warm, flat cola with cinnamon? Hot cocoa with marshmallows and a dash of Red Bull? A warmed-over melted scoop ice cream poured into half a cup of coffee? You'll probably regret at least a few of your concoctions, and you sure won't lose any weight, but the surge of heat and sugar could give you the edge you need to get back to gaming after a morning spent shoveling snow.



STEALTH GAMING

If all else fails, think of all those times you stayed up past your bedtime, reading a comic book under the covers with a flashlight. Remember how toasty it got under there? Fire up the electric blanket and camp out in bed with your favorite PSP or DS game. Your parents' or significant other might not approve, but at least you'll still be able to feel your fingers when the ice finally melts.



Geek Speak 2.0

Big words, small type

Resolution: The number of pixels in each row and column displayed on your television screen. 1080p uses a resolution of 1920x1280, and thus uses a total of 2,073,600 pixels for each frame. 720p, by comparison, uses a resolution of 1280x720, and thus requires only 921,600 pixels for each image.

Polygon: A two-dimensional shape, usually a triangle, that is stitched together with many others to create a three-dimensional object for use in modern game engines. Early 3D games were severely limited in the number they could use, but modern games use so many that seemingly smooth curves are now the norm.

Sprite: An image or series of images representing a game object in a two-dimensional game. Though sprites fell out of use for many years with the rise of 3D graphics, they've shown up in force once again in downloadable games.

9 Must-Play iPhone Games

With over 170 million iProducts out in the wild, Apple is focused on bringing new gaming experiences to the masses. Here a few early gems for the iPhone and iPod Touch.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (\$7.99)

The first Star Wars game for Apple is especially impressive because of the stellar graphics and touch functionality. In TFU, you are not in direct control of moving your character, but instead use touch-based gestures to perform Force powers, such as lifting enemies in the air, deflecting lasers with your Lightsaber, and Force push.



Tap Tap Revenge (Free)

Like Guitar Hero and Rock Band, Tap Tap Revenge prompts scroll down the screen on an electric highway, and you press them in rhythm to trigger music. But this game also incorporates gestures using the accelerometer where you must shake the handheld instead of touching the screen. Now get to Tappin'.



Kroll (\$4.99)

Kroll is a hack-n-slash action game played with only three buttons—move, fight attack, and strong attack—which are located on the left and right sides of the touchscreen. Kroll is limited to move and attack in only two directions, but that's what makes it so simple, fun and instantly addictive.



Real Soccer 09 (\$4.99)

Real Soccer 09 completely blew us away because of the sheer complexity of what's happening onscreen. A soccer game with multiple characters onscreen at once, it overlays a directional pad and face buttons on the touchscreen allowing touch-based gestures to perform special moves like spins and more.



Hidden Expedition: Everest (\$9.99)

Everest is completely different than any other game in this list. It's an ultra casual, hidden-object style game where the goal is to find items in a busy scene like a virtual version of Highlights magazine's hidden pictures.



Crash Bandicoot: Nitro Kart 3D (\$5.99)

Crash channels Mario Kart with this simple and easy-to-play racing game. You race around in a go-kart using the accelerometer to steer and pick up items that give you speed boosts, missiles to knock out other racers, and TNT to blow up people behind you. Crash racing fans will feel right at home.



Topple (\$0.99)

Topple is the new Tetris. In this puzzler, you stack different shaped blocks on top of one another to build the highest tower possible... without toppling. Use one finger to guide blocks, two fingers to rotate them, and see how high you can stack them.



MazeFinger (Free)

MazeFinger is an awesome puzzle game because it's really easy to pick up and play, but will also test your finger dexterity to the max. In MazeFinger, you use your index to guide a glowing orb through a variety of mazes that get increasingly complicated. Later puzzles introduce obstacles such as tight bottleneck corners and laser-type gates.



Fieldrunners (\$4.99)

Tower Defense receives the magic touch in Fieldrunners. Use your finger to strategically position a variety of turrets to stop increasingly difficult waves of enemy soldiers, motorcyclists, and helicopters from entering your base. The four different turrets include standard machine guns, missile launchers, electric Tesla coils, and sticky green ooze-turrets that slow enemies.



...ft Auto...New Grand Theft Auto...New Grand Theft Auto...**Welcome to my New Year's wrap-up column, where I talk about the highs (and lows) of 2008. It's been a crazy year, so let's get started...**
My overall "favorite" game ended up as Call of Duty: World at War. I know, I know, it takes zero imagination to pick a straightforward FPS sequel over innovators such as Fallout 3 and LittleBigPlanet, both of which I figured would be my GOTY finalists last month. But I simply couldn't pry my fingers off World at War. And in the end, isn't that what really counts?...
My biggest letdown ended up being Resistance 2. It's an enjoyable shooter overall, and offers a ton of online replay value. But the production values were so left-and-miss, especially in the campaign, that I often found myself frustrated by the myriad of missed opportunities. Is it a bad game? Not at all. But it's not as groundbreaking and as polished as I'd expected. Here's hoping Insomniac Games goes all-out for Resistance 3...
The most pleasant surprise of 2008: Left 4 Dead. GamePro previews editor Travis Moses and I wrote a rather critical preview of this co-op zombie shooter back in October, one which didn't necessarily endear us with developer Valve Software. But our critiques were legitimate: we were frustrated by the long respawn times and weak abilities of the boss zombies. I'm happy to report that the final version of the game is much improved, and addresses many of the issues we complained about. See, game developers? We're on your side...
Best 2008 game everybody forgot about: Metal Gear Solid 4. The end-of-2008 release schedule was so crowded that a game like Metal Gear Solid 4—a truly breathtaking accomplishment—is in danger of being forgotten by awards time. I certainly hope not, as MGS4 was one of the most unforgettable games I've ever played...
Best 2009 game that I wish were out in 2008: Street Fighter IV. We've been playing with an early build of the game, and it's become the new obsession with the guys around the office. Mark your calendars...
What were your highs and lows of 2008? Send your best comments to sid_shuman@gamepro.com and I'll print the best next month right here in STATIC...
MadWorld...MadWorld...MadW...



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Enemy soldiers will almost never run out into the open and will stick to cover like flies on rotting meat, forcing you to think before you engage them.

KILLZONE 2

We play through Killzone 2's glorious campaign. Full details below.

PS3

Developer: Guerrilla Games Publisher: Sony Release Date: February

GamePro travels 5000 miles to the Netherlands, the headquarters of Guerrilla Games, to get the rare opportunity to play the full version of Killzone 2. The game is still a month away from being unleashed, but it's already one of the best looking games we've seen on the PlayStation 3 and a strong contender for shooter of the year.

A LIVING, BREATHING WORLD

The team behind Killzone 2 isn't kidding when they say that every bullet fired out of the muzzle of your gun has a dramatic impact in the game. Whether you're decapitating Helghast grunt soldiers with an M13 semi-automatic shotgun or blowing apart concrete structures with a Cerberus Chaingun, there's a tremendous amount of destruction to be had as you encounter new enemies and mission types.

When you shoot an adversary, it's not as simple as nailing them with enough bullets until they're dead. Enemies' bodies respond in a number of realistic ways depending on where you shoot them and what you shoot them with, performing a ballet act of sorts as they double over and die. Certain deadlier foes require a bit more strategy to defeat, such as the hulking, heavily-armored class of Helghast soldiers that lug around a massive machine gun and can only be destroyed by blowing up the explosive canisters located on their backs.

In terms of the destruction you can inflict on your surroundings, Killzone 2 has a lot to offer. Cement pillars in the environment crack and

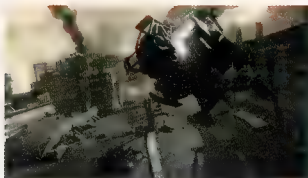
shatter, revealing the rusted rebar underneath, as you shoot them in a way that's reminiscent of the bank lobby shootout scene from *The Matrix*. Even certain buildings can be taken down all together with the right amount of firepower or by setting an explosive charge. Everything from pots and pans to wooden blinds that populate the world can be shot or destroyed. An example of something that brings the hellish world of Helghan alive are the corpse-eating cockroaches that crawl around the terrain which can be exterminated with some lead. These are just a few of the ways Guerrilla has pushed Killzone 2 in terms of how immersed you become in the environment.

BURN IN HELGHAN

The attention to detail pays off in a big way as the game strives to capture a believable large-scale planetary invasion. This is shown off primarily in the immense variety of level types you'll play through as you progress from mission to mission in Killzone 2. The first Killzone game may have suffered to some degree from levels that looked a bit similar to one another, but after playing through Killzone 2 we can say with confidence that every mission has its own unique personality and visual style. Virtually all of the textures and building types in the game are encrusted with a layer of grime and corrosion to the point where you really do feel like you're storming



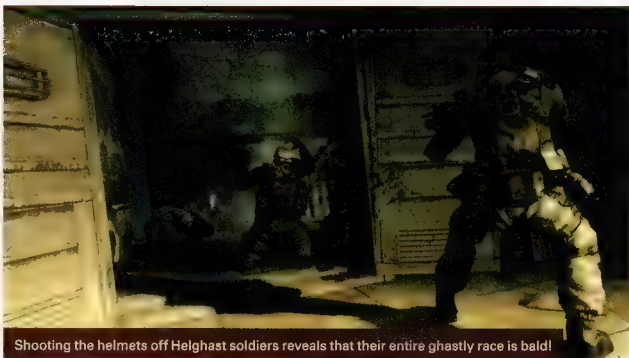
Don't let Killzone 2 protagonist's fauxhawk fool you—Sev's one lean, mean, Helghast-slaughtering machine.



the treacherous home planet of the gas-masked fascist aggressors.

Throughout the course of the game you're engaging enemies in an assortment of rich environments, from Helghast-infested trains of the Tharsis Refinery mission to the war-scorched beaches of Corinth River, to the final epic showdown in Visari's Palace. There's a great deal of range in the things you'll see as you progress in Killzone 2's campaign, and the visual themes of missions aren't the only things that'll strike you. Levels are broken into different tasks you'll have to complete, such as using the Sixaxis to set explosives and blow things up, fighting bosses, and vehicle missions.

There are several instances in Killzone 2's campaign where you'll get the chance to maneuver some truly badass vehicles. At the conclusion of the first mission, the onslaught on Corinth River ends with you manning a tank, obliterating an almost endless horde of ground troops and other tanks. This scenario definitely kicks the campaign off with a bang, but there are other surprises later on in the game, such as an unforgettable level where you control a fully-mobile mech. In the Maelstra Barrens mission you operate a mech similar to the one in Aliens that Ripley uses to slay the Alien queen, only this one is armed with some heavy duty weaponry. As you move around in this Mars-like outdoor level in the mech suit, you use the vehicle's machine guns and cannon to vaporize



Shooting the helmets off Helghast soldiers reveals that their entire ghastly race is bald!

onrushing foes. You can even walk right over them, crushing them under your enormous metallic foot.

FLAMETHROWERS AND HIGH VOLTAGE

The weapons in your arsenal are also worth talking about. You have more traditional weapons at your disposal such as pistols, shotguns, machine guns, sniper rifles, and rocket launchers, and the like, but the further along you get in the game you'll come across some more interesting firepower. One such weapon is Killzone 2's flamethrower, which is one of the best uses of the fiery weapon we've seen in a first-person shooter. Wielding the weapon can be devastating to the flesh of your aggressors as it spews out jets of fire that can quickly incinerate a cluster of enemies at close range. The most impressive thing about the flamethrower is how the targets you hit with it burn realistically.

Enemies engulfed in flames flail their arms around wildly and even Nazi-esque flags bearing the Helghast insignia can burn in some instances.

Another devastating weapon you'll acquire later on in the game is a gun that fires a burst of electricity. Let this beast loose to release a stream of deadly electricity that automatically locks onto hostiles, cooking them with its devastating voltage.

Killzone 2 seems like it's been in development forever, but after going knee deep in both the game's multiplayer modes and single-player campaign, we've got to say that it looks like the final product is going to be worth the wait.

—Patrick Shaw



You and your ISA chums are definitely outnumbered this time around. A word of advice: always stay with your squadmates if you don't want to get slaughtered.



Aim for explosive barrels to trigger a string of detonations that will boost your point multiplier.

50 CENT: BLOOD ON THE SAND

Rapper 50 Cent tears up the Middle East looking for a diamond skull: So bad it's good?

PS3 Xbox 360

Developer: Swordfish Studios Publisher: THQ Release Date: January

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand is so ridiculous that it's actually fun to play. It's a third-person shooter like *Gears of War 2*, but with a way less serious tone. For example, the story is about hip-hop star 50 Cent in the Middle East. After performing a show, his payment is stolen—a diamond skull worth \$10 million—and 50 Cent isn't leaving without getting it back. Let the ridiculousness begin!

MURDERHOLIC RAP POINTS

Before each mission starts, you get to choose a henchman from the G-Unit crew to be your sidekick—Tony Yayo, Llyod Banks, or DJ Whoo Kid. Or play the game with a friend in co-op, where the first player is 50 Cent and the second player chooses between the sidekicks. This sidekick will help you fight, lift heavy doors, and hoist you up to higher platforms.

The goal of the game is to earn lots of points by killing enemies, locating hidden items, and

finishing levels as fast as you can. The easiest way to get points is by combo-killing enemies. Each time you kill an enemy your combo meter goes up, but the meter won't last forever. You also earn points on how stylish you take out enemies. Blowing up explosive barrels, for instance, will net you more points, as will taunting your enemies. And then there are hidden items, such as posters to collect and targets to shoot that add to your point multiplier. The final ingredient to earning the biggest score possible is speed. Complete each level as fast as you can by efficiently killing enemies and collecting all hidden items for a perfect score. The final score for each level is calculated into bronze, silver, and gold medals.

The core gameplay is fast and chaotic. Imagine *Gears of War 2* meets an arcade shooter like Sega's *The Club*. You have four different weapons to choose from at any time, which include guns such as assault rifles, dual Uzis, dual pistols, and rocket launchers. Each enemy you kill fills up a "Gangsta Fire" meter, which is a slow motion bullet-time effect mode that's best to save when you're close to death, but also earns you more points when active. You can also run up to enemies to perform one-hit Counter Kills, which were featured in the first 50 Cent: Bulletproof game. There are over 20 different Counter Kills in 50 Cent: BotS, but you can only have five equipped at a time.

Counter Kills and Taunts can be purchased and swapped out at payphones, where you access the

in-game merchant. The same goes for weapons. Because 50 Cent: BotS is all about getting big points, the more violent Counter Kills and Taunts cost more money, but increase your score significantly when used.



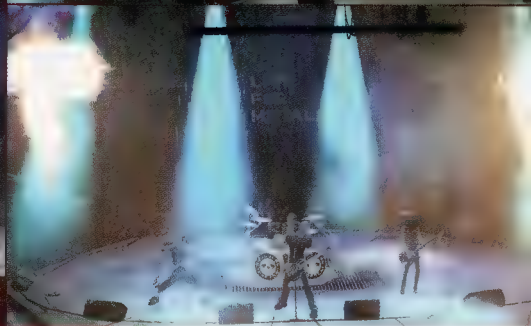
50 CENT BY THE NUMBERS

50 Cent is all about the Benjamins, baby. The game features 42 rap tracks, of which 18 are exclusive. There are 24 levels that make up nine single-player campaign chapters. You get to choose from three G-Unit sidekicks to fight with, or play with a friend in two-player cooperative mode.

The first 50 Cent: Bulletproof game wasn't exactly cool or fun to play, but *Blood on the Sand* sure is. The Unreal 3.0 engine really lends a helping hand to the core shooting mechanics and definitely the graphics, which are quite impressive compared to other games that have used the engine.

—Travis Moses





Time to up the soundproofing in your house; your neighbors might not appreciate hours of double-bass drum stomping.

GUITAR HERO: METALLICA

Metallica fans unite and raise your fists for the ultimate metal fest.

PS3 Xbox 360 Wii PS2

Developer: Neversoft Publisher: Activision Blizzard Release Date: First Quarter 2009

It's time for Metallica fans to unite: Neversoft is readying its latest Guitar Hero title (the second to be focused on a single band) and we can already sense the mass of devil-horned fists that will be sure to accompany every metal fan's performance when the latest Guitar Hero drenches them in a distortion-filled noise-fest this spring.

THE MORE THE MERRIER

In addition to the plethora of Metallica tracks featured in the game, GH: Metallica will include tracks from over 20 other metal bands. Though the metal genre has been featured extensively in other Guitar Hero titles, we're hoping for the chance to rip through some really extreme tracks from the past and present (a track from the metal band Kirk Hammett cut his teeth in, Exodus, is surely in order). The full track listing has yet to be released as we go to press, but we do know that tracks from the Foo Fighters, Alice in Chains, and Queen will be featured. We're confident shred aficionados will be satisfied by the 45-track set.

PEDAL TO THE METAL

One unexpected (but essential) addition to GH: Metallica will be the option to set up a second bass drum pedal and access a new

difficulty level which will allow advanced players to experience metal drumming the way it's meant to be: thundering double-bass blasts that will surely leave players in a heap of sweat after a particularly difficult set. The "Expert+" difficulty is sure to challenge even the most stalwart of video game drummers. Activision also promises more responsive hardware in general (most likely a response to peeved gamers who had trouble with the World Tour drumset). Hopefully the improved hardware will be reinforced, as there's only so much pounding a piece of video game hardware can take, realistically.

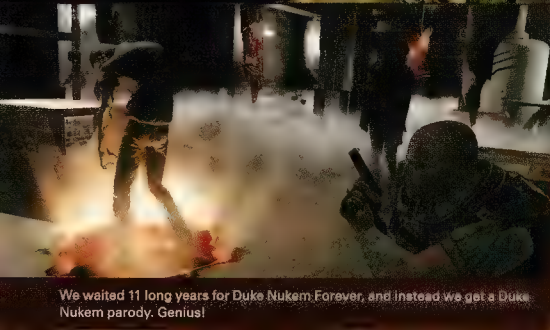
POP-UP VIDEO

Though what we can expect out of GH: Metallica will most likely be the same old song and dance that we've come to expect out of Guitar Hero titles with a few extra bells and whistles, there will be one feature that hearkens back to the days of VHT's addictive pop-up video series in the form of heavy metal trivia bubbles that will appear when you play a previously completed track. Though this seems like a hokey last-minute add on, it'll be interesting to see what Neversoft includes in these segments; hey, maybe we'll even get some juicy James Hetfield roadie stories...wait, I take that back, blech.



TOO INCLUSIVE?

Though we're excited for the opportunity to play some insane metal tracks, we're hoping that there's still a good variety of songs in this latest offering. The sheer variety of tracks available in past Guitar Hero titles has been the one thing that keeps rhythm game fans coming back for more. Prepare your vocal chords and do some finger exercises because you'll need both for Guitar Hero: Metallica.—Andy Burt



We waited 11 long years for Duke Nukem Forever, and instead we get a Duke Nukem parody. Genius!

EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD

Duke Nukem step aside: Parodying a parody, Matt Hazard is the ultimate action hero badass.

PS3 Xbox 360

Developer: Vicious Cycle Software Publisher: D3 Publisher Release Date: Spring 2009

Every once in a while a game will come along that reminds you of a game that you used to play when you were a kid. Such is the case with *Eat Lead*, in which Matt Hazard bears more than a passing resemblance to Duke Nukem. The witty one liners, the comedic relief, and the kickass gameplay are what made Duke Nukem a star in the 1990s. But now he's a washed-up has been. Some might say the same about Matt Hazard, but the thing is that his story is completely made up. Fabricated.

KILLING AN EGO

That's the joke about Matt Hazard, that he used to be a huge star back in the good old 8-bit days when he starred in such big hits as *The Adventures of Matt in Hazard Land*, *A Fistfull of Hazard*, and his first jump to 3D in *Matt Hazard 3D*. Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, Hazard was a huge star with lots of money and all the babes. Then in 2000, the owners of the Matt Hazard franchise soured the brand by branching the Hazard's name into other genres. Haz-Matt Carts followed by Choking Hazard: Candy Gramm destroyed Hazard's career and left him a broken man.

But sulk not for *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* is the legendary comeback of the franchise

and will be Hazard's first leap onto the next-generation of consoles. "It's time to kick ass and chew bubble gum," right, Matt?

YOU ONLY LIVE 1317 TIMES

Already *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* sounds like an awesome game to me. And I can guarantee that it only gets better when you see it in action. It's a third-person shooter with a cover system that looks a lot like *Gears of War 2*. You can aim down the sights, blind fire, and all that jazz. But the best part is the humor. For one, Matt Hazard is voiced by none other than funny-man Will Arnett from *Arrested Development*, and the villain is Neil Patrick Harris of *Doogie Houser, M.D.* fame. Second, one



minute you're fighting black-tie mobsters and the next you're fighting zombies, or even cowboys.

Apparently, you find out that someone is hacking the game and spawning enemies from previous Matt Hazard games (which are completely fictional, remember). When the spawning occurs, you can watch the enemies assimilate through a cool *Matrix*-like effect.

I think it's obvious that Matt Hazard is on *GamePro's* radar in a big way. Hey, if we can't get our Duke Nukem fix, then we'll get it somewhere else. And so far, things look promising for the comeback of the decade. Cheers to you, Matt Hazard. May your return be even more explosive than weapons of Matt destruction. —Travis Moses

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Damnation mixes the past and future to create a time of its own.

DAMNATION

Codemasters upcoming *Damnation* mixes the Old West with a techno future to create a steam punk atmosphere with an abundance of jumping, grabbing, and shooting.

PS3 Xbox 360 PC

■ Developer: Blue Omega ■ Publisher: Codemasters ■ Release Date: February

Damnation takes place in an alternate reality where the Civil War never ended and the Old West still rules with new technological prowess. You play as Hamilton Rourke, a rebel leader whose main focus is to bring down the tyrannical industrialist known as Prescott. Prescott intends on using his advanced technology to put a stranglehold on the country. As Rourke, you must use your wits, athletics, and major gun power to survive the ordeal.

SHOOTER OR PLATFORMER?

Damnation may be classified as a shooter by some, but it has more in common with games like *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* than *Gears of War*. The many shooting sections are divided up fairly equally with platforming areas. The majority of these areas utilize a lot of vertical movement often giving the player a bird's eye view of their surroundings.

Breaking up the platforming and shooting areas are some driving sections utilizing various vehicles including motor bikes and the "Trike," which has the ability to drive on walls as a means of maneuvering past gaps. It's unknown how much driving will be part of the final game, but it was

included in two separate sections fairly early on in our preview build.

SPIRIT GUIDE

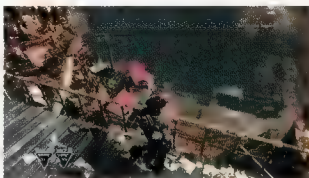
The controls are simple with jumps and grabs being performed with a single button, often without the need to push the stick in the direction you want to go. While this is nice for beginners, it seems a bit over simplified for more seasoned players. Shooting is done with the Left and Right Triggers, and pushing in the left thumbstick will manually reload your weapon while pushing the right thumbstick will pull your view in closer for a more accurate shot. When not shooting, the left bumper can be

used to deploy Spirit Mode, a type of mind magic that will reveal the locations of enemies in an upcoming area. In Spirit Mode, the bodies of the enemies glow a bright blue and reveal themselves even through walls, giving the player a healthy advantage before entering a new area.

Damnation has a rich campaign mode that can be played alone or cooperatively on the same console via a split screen. There will also be various maps that can be played in multiplayer versus mode.

DAMN YANKEES!

Originally slated for release in 2008, *Damnation's* date has been pushed back until early 2009. In the end, this is probably a good thing for a title that would likely get lost under the crush of this holiday's AAA titles like *Fallout 3* and *Gears of War 2*. There will always be multiple games competing for gamer's attention but a late winter release pretty much guarantees that unknown new games like *Damnation* will get fair attention without too much competition. We'll be sure to update you on the status of *Damnation* as soon as a solid release date is announced. —Flynn De Marco



UAT: 110%

FPS: 24

Double

06



[GEEKED AT BIRTH.]

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NO MORE HEROES: DESPERATE STRUGGLE

The sequel to *No More Heroes*, *GamePro's* 2008 Wii Game of the Year is in the works, and we couldn't be more excited.

Wii

■ Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture ■ Publisher: TBD ■ Release Date: 2010

Unfortunately, new information is extremely scarce at this point. But Diehard No More Heroes fans we are, and we've scoured every source and examined every second of footage to collect the six most important facts about No More Heroes: *Desperate Struggle*.

NEW WEAPONS

The first major reveal in the trailer was protagonist Travis Touchdown brandishing a new Beam Katana. As opposed to the *Star Wars*-like katana of the original, Touchdown's new sword looks much more stylized this time around. The curved blade and pointy tip is now more reminiscent of the Japanese samurai sword. And did we mention it's a million times more badass?

NEW ENEMIES

Between the psychotic superhero wannabe, the maniacal magician, and the brutal baseball babe, the original No More Heroes had its share of memorable boss characters. We've only been introduced to one new enemy Touchdown will be desperately struggling against, but she looks to be more than enough of a challenge. The red-haired vixen debuted in the video trailer sports a six-pronged jetpack. Hovering through the air with six streams of fire surrounding her body, this floating fox looks to be as strong as she is sexy.

IT'S A TRAVISOCIETY

Having plowed through 10 of the world's most dangerous assassins, it looks like Travis Touchdown is finally getting the recognition he deserves. The trailer was rife with imagery idolizing Touchdown, with his visage adorning flags painted on the sides of buildings. Hopefully Travis Touchdown as an icon is something carried over to *Desperate Struggle*, as it would be nice to see the dorky badass cast in a different light. At the very least, we hope his gas station attending and melon-hauling days are over.

TOUCHDOWN'S A TERMINATOR

It seems like this sequel is taking its cues from another memorable follow-up; *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Touchdown echoes Arnold's signature catchphrase at the conclusion of the trailer, stating "I will be back!" That's followed by an explosion and a thumping theme similar to that of the famed sci-fi franchise. What other similarities could the two sequels share? Could the end of the world be a part of *Desperate Struggle*?

THERE'S A "HARDER" PUBLISHER?

Despite the love lavished on the original by us and other outlets, No More Heroes wasn't a huge hit for Ubisoft. Perhaps it's for that reason

that the publishing giant might not be taking the reigns for the second chapter of Travis Touchdown's adventure. As we go to press, the publishing fate of No More Heroes: *Desperate Struggle* is still up in the air, but there's a strong chance that it will be published by X-Seed, a company known for releasing more hardcore fare. Between this game and the unique 2D action-RPG *Muramasa: The Demon Blade*, X-Seed could be bringing a different brand of gaming to the Wii that hardcore gamers so desperately desire. Don't fret about development, though—*Desperate Struggle* is being created by the same team as the original, including Killer 7 and Contact director Goichi Suda.

2009? HAH!

Bold prediction? Not really. It's a safe bet that No More Heroes: *Desperate Struggle* will be a 2010 release, which is a bit far down the line, but we're confident that it will allow for a thorough development cycle. The team will have more than enough time to analyze the original's few faults (the bland overworld, boring sidejobs) and focus on enhancing its strengths (the amazing combat and unforgettable story), and we're certain it will compete with any game on any console next year.

—Dave Rudden

BLOOD OF BAHAMUT

DS

■ Developer and Publisher. Square Enix ■ Release Date. Late 2009



フリーズホーム：氷属性の氷竜をおさす竜華。

In Square Enix's *Blood of Bahamut*, battles get hairy when Gigant enters the scene. Here's a ProTip: Don't mess with guys who carry mountains on their shoulders (art of this titan is shown below).

What would RPG fans do if Square-Enix didn't keep pumping out Final Fantasy spin-offs? Their latest offshoot, *Blood of Bahamut* looks to be a promising action-RPG for fans looking to quench their thirst for Final Fantasy XIII before it hits shelves later this year (fingers crossed).

FAMILIAR FACES, NEW SETTING

Blood of Bahamut sees Square Enix putting an unlikely (but intriguing) character from the Final Fantasy oeuvre at the forefront. No stranger to creating spin-offs of their most beloved series, Square may be going out on a limb with Bahamut, and we couldn't be more excited. For those not familiar with the creature Bahamut, it is essentially a giant dragon that has appeared in many forms through the years, usually as an ally that players could call into battle to deal massive damage. While story details are murky at the moment, we're hoping Square uses this title as a vehicle to give some back story as to why these creatures exist in the first place, which Final Fantasy VI shed some light into.

SHADOW OF THE...ESPER?

The first inkling of evidence that Square-Enix was creating this title started with a countdown clock and an ambiguous but amazingly drawn website with zero game details (two of Square's favorite tools to get gamers hyped about upcoming game announcements). Once the clock finished counting down, fans were treated to an in-game video sequence, showcasing Bahamut's battle system... and a giant roaming creature known as Gigant crushing the player with giant rocks and shooting beams from its eyes as the player fought off smaller baddies on a stone ledge. The scope is indeed impressive for a DS title, bringing to mind

the epic boss battles in *Shadow of the Colossus*, featuring Gigant's hulking mass across both DS screens simultaneously.

From what we've seen so far of the battle system, *Blood of Bahamut* seems to create a mix from equal parts *Star Ocean* and the *Tales* series that should please RPG fans who want their action in real time. Four player co-op has been confirmed, and judging by a recent cover of *Shonen Jump* magazine it appears that Ifrit (a demonic Final Fantasy mainstay) will also appear in the game. If all goes smoothly, *Blood of Bahamut* should turn out to be a worthy Square-Enix title that Final Fantasy fans can get behind. —Andy Burt



RACE PRO

Xbox 360

■ Developer SimBin ■ Publisher Atari
■ Release Date January



Gran Turismo 5 may be on its way to racing fans later this year, but Atari's going to beat them to the finish line with the upcoming *Race Pro*, which comes from veteran racing developers SimBin.

As a cautionary warning, we want to point out that *RACE Pro* is no *MotorStorm* or *Pure*; go too wide on a crucial turn and you've already thrown the race. SimBin prides itself on creating extremely realistic racers, and *RACE Pro* looks to be just that. The car models are designed down to the smallest of detail, the cars handle as close to the real cars they represent, and each track springs to life with realistic bumps and unforgiving hairpin turns. While this may turn off casual racing aficionados, SimBin is hoping that *RACE Pro* will please the casual and hardcore alike.

RACE Pro supports up to 12 players online, which should make for some exhilarating matches, especially considering the number of real life racing vistas such as Milan's Nazionale Monza and Monterey, California's Laguna Seca, recreated using satellite imagery. While complaints concerning the frame rate have come up during early demos of the game, we're hoping SimBin takes some extra time to polish this issue up to meet the unmatched level of detail they've created in the tracks and cars. —Andy Burt



THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

PS3 Xbox 360 PC

Developer: Starbreeze Studios Publisher: Atari Release Date: Spring 2009



The muddled story of *The Chronicles of Riddick* game is a confusing tale of publisher swaps and development issues, but the game is in a better place now and has turned into a much grander vision. Originally, the game was planned to be a simple next-gen remake of *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*. According to Starbreeze lead designer Ian Stevens, the decision to do a remake was because *Escape from Butcher Bay* is not backwards compatible with the Xbox 360, and we agree that more people should experience this critically acclaimed cult hit.

Then there was the publisher issue where Activision Blizzard dropped Riddick from their lineup, leaving the future of the game up in the air. However, two months later Atari snagged the Riddick video game franchise and have since then pushed Starbreeze to make *The Chronicles of*

Riddick: *Assault on Dark Athena* more than a next-gen remake, adding a new chapter of gameplay and multiplayer.

PRISON SHANK

Assault on Dark Athena is unique in the fact that it's more of a first-person fighter than a first-person shooter. The game focuses on stealth and close-quarters melee combat instead of the use of guns. However, that doesn't mean you can't use guns in the game; it's just a rarity. Your primary weapon is a pair of razor-sharp Ulak prison knives that are used to block, attack, and perform special counter moves. Most of the fighting in the game is face-to-face, but Riddick can also choke enemies into a meat shield position and use their guns.

Another feature returning from the original game is the stealth action. When hidden in



the shadows, the screen turns a blue tint—that means enemy drones cannot see you. This type of stealthy gameplay requires you to wait, watch patrol routes, and calculate the next kill. When you successfully kill an enemy in silence, remember to drag his body into the shadows or else another patrolling guard may find him and sound the alarm.



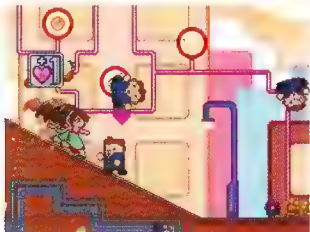
MERCENARY ESCAPE

Assault on Dark Athena is shaping up to be great game for anybody who missed *Escape from Butcher Bay*. Even if you did play it, there are plenty of reasons to come back for more. All the assets have received a visual facelift, the environments have been expanded, and the audio re-mastered. On top of that, there is a whole new chapter that takes place after *Butcher Bay* on a mercenary ship called the *Dark Athena*. —Travis Moses

THE CHASE: FELIX MEETS FELICITY

DS

Developer: Razorback Developments Publisher: Atari Release Date: January



The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity is a fast-paced 2D platforming game for the Nintendo DS where players navigate their way through bizarre obstructions, interruptions, and mishaps, using the touchscreen and stylus to draw their own platforms to change the levels horizontally or vertically. Jump in the shoes of Felix or Felicity to race across town just in time to rendezvous.

RUN, FELIX RUN

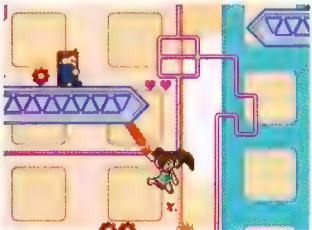
This fun little game immediately captured my heart back in November 2008. Once I picked up the basic controls I didn't want to put the game down. In *The Chase*, you choose to play as either Felix, who is fast but can't jump very high, or Felicity, who is slow but can jump much higher. I recommend you play as the slower Felicity at first because the game is pretty fast. Actually, the characters never

stop running. The speed is not something you control. What you do control is the direction in which Felix and Felicity run—left or right.

To avoid obstructions and collect goodies, you can jump or use the stylus to draw your own rainbow path the characters can run on. To take out patrolling baddies, press down on the directional pad to slide. The controls are simple, but getting used to the constant running takes some practice.

SURFER DUDE AND DUDETEE

Storm surfing is a cool feature that's for experts looking to maximize points. Each level has a storm that moves from left to right (or floods from top to bottom) that eventually consumes the entire map. You lose if the storm catches up to you. However, if you teeter on the edge of the storm the amount of points you earn are greatly increased.



The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity is the perfect gift to pick up for a girlfriend or boyfriend on Valentine's Day, as you can sit together and draw a path to the object of your affection. —Travis Moses



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The background is a vibrant blue collage of various game-related images. In the top left, there are three wooden blocks with numbers 3, 5, and 2. A pixelated cat is in the upper center, and a black character with a yellow star is on the right. A green tank is in the bottom left, and several gears are in the bottom center. A red tomato-like character is in the bottom right. The text "Thousands of Free Games" is prominently displayed in a large, orange, jagged speech bubble in the center.

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THE 9

Only the biggest games make *GamePro's* monthly spastic info dump



Bayonetta

I can't get **1** *Bayonetta* off my mind. The saucy witch with a one-piece that comes off faster than a cowboy hat at a hoedown has me transfixed—could this be a game that's so bad that it's good? For the uninformed, *Bayonetta* is an over-the-top action game like the Devil May Cry series, where you play as an oversexed witch named Bayonetta who uses contortionist karate moves and magical hair (seriously) to destroy demonic enemies. On the complete opposite end of the genre spectrum, we have **2** *Killzone 2*, which comes out this month and looks to be the PlayStation 3's ultimate first-person shooter. Everything about *Killzone 2* screams "quality", and the massive variety of play modes give you a butt load of value for your dollar. The single-player campaign is "the most intense action movie you've ever played," according to enthusiastic *GamePro* editor Patrick Shaw, and the multiplayer mixes the best of Call of Duty with an innovative in-game clan system that allows you to bet against other clans with Valor Points. Care to wager? **3** *Street Fighter IV* hits the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 in February, but the *GamePro* staff has been playing an early build for months and we can't speak highly enough of the much-anticipated fighter.



Street Fighter IV



Splatterhouse

Could this be the biggest comeback of the decade? *GamePro* bets big money, or Valor Points rather, on it. In other news, Sega's **4** *Aliens: Colonial Marines* is rumored to have seen a slight setback as we go to press. According to Gearbox Software's president Randy Pitchford, *Aliens: CM* has not been canned. Instead the independent developer has been undergoing "some transformative changes" resulting in "talent changes." Well, that certainly sounds reassuring, right? On the bright side, it sounds like the game is getting a little more love, and speaking as huge fans of

When mainstay protagonist and *Friday* the 13th Jason Voorhees look-alike Rick takes damage, his flesh and muscle sinew is ripped off in real-time, revealing the bloody tendons and broken bones underneath. But don't worry, Rick's demonic mask helps heal his wounds quickly. *Splatterhouse* fans should be pleased to hear that the new *Splatterhouse* is a remake of the original 1988 beat 'em up arcade game. But there's another remake of an old classic that has the *GamePro* staff in a giddy state of excitement. Features editor Dave Rudden and Patrick Shaw screamed like little girls at a

Star Wars: The Old Republic is bigger than the Death Star and prettier than Chewbacca.

the sci-fi series, we hope it's the best *Aliens* game ever. Speaking of ETs, **5** *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, which takes place on the Red Planet, is getting better and better every time we see it. When I first played *Guerrilla*, I reported that the real-time environment destruction didn't react realistically enough to be believable, but my oh my have I been proven wrong. In a recent showing, I walked away thinking *Red Faction: Guerrilla* may have the most impressive physics engine in any game since *Crysis*. The producers on hand told me the physics engine is so advanced the developers actually had to take architecture classes to create the fully destructible buildings in the game. One day, the developers swapped out the old physics tech for new tech...and all the in-game buildings fell apart without real-world housing foundations and rebar. And while I'm talking about the house that destruction built, have you seen the new **6** *Splatterhouse* yet? It looks gorri-fically awesome!

Beatles concert when they heard about the return of **7** *Punch-Out!!* on the Nintendo Wii. Now if we can only get an uppercut of a feature story in one of the upcoming issues, it might calm the fanatics down a bit. Of course, there is no calming down **8** *God of War III* hype, which popped up again in the headlines at press time. Series creator David Jaffe may be working on other projects now, but when he got a sneak peek at *God of War III* he said, "Holy, holy, holy, f***ing hell. [Gears 2] looks about as good as a next-gen game can look, but f***ing wait until you see the amazing graphics...just f***ing wait." Jaffe, we heart you. We also heart LucasArts and BioWare, who are hard at work on **9** *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, a new *Star Wars* MMO that BioWare considers to be the official sequel to the *Knights of the Old Republic* games. Apparently, the game is bigger than the Death Star and prettier than Chewbacca. Wait, is that right? —Travis Moses



Red Faction: Guerrilla



Punch-Out!!

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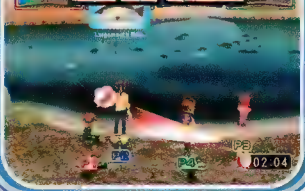
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Wii



XBOX 360: CLASS OF 2009

There's no going back now—2008 proved that the Xbox 360 is here to stay. GamePro celebrates with epic new previews of Halo Wars, Halo 3: ODST, Watchmen, and 15 more of the most promising Xbox 360 games of 2009. All hail Xbox!

By Sid Shuman, Dave Rudder, Tracy Nokes, Dan Snierson, and Filmm De Alencar

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GTAIV: THE LOST AND THE DAMNED

The always-controversial series returns with a Hell's Angel twist

We've been waiting months to learn more, but we've finally found out the vital details of the explosive expansion downloadable content for Grand Theft Auto IV. The content, due out on February 17th, will consist of an entirely new storyline entitled "The Lost and the Damned," and it will feature a new protagonist interacting with old favorites.

The man of the (extended) hour is Johnny Klebitz, the leader of the Liberty City motorcycle gang known as "The Lost." According to Dan Houser, vice president of creative development for Rockstar Games "Johnny is a very different character than Niko, with a very different background...I can say that the story will show you a different side of Liberty City."

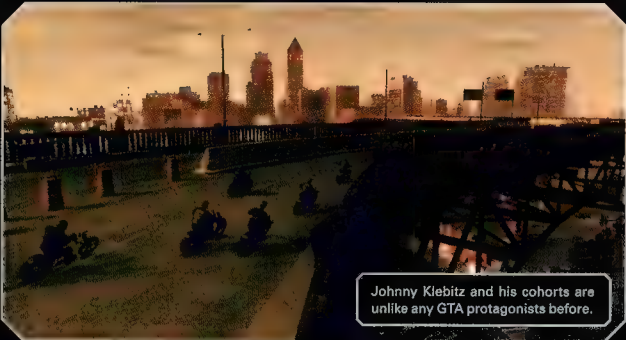
We haven't seen any confirmed shots of Johnny yet, but many of the newest screenshots seem to focus on the back of one particularly burly biker. Johnny already has a built-in support system in a badass, Hells Angels-esque biker gang, but one shot in particular shows a group of bikers walking at our assumed protagonist, which tosses all sorts of questions into the narrative. Is Johnny taking on the Lost? Is he facing off against a rival biker gang?

Another big mystery is the price tag. As one of the biggest expansions for one of the best games ever, Rockstar can put almost any dollar amount on "The Lost and the Damned" and fans will pony up the dough. If the company wants to do so without upsetting the hardcore fanbase, though, it should place the content in the \$15-20 price range.

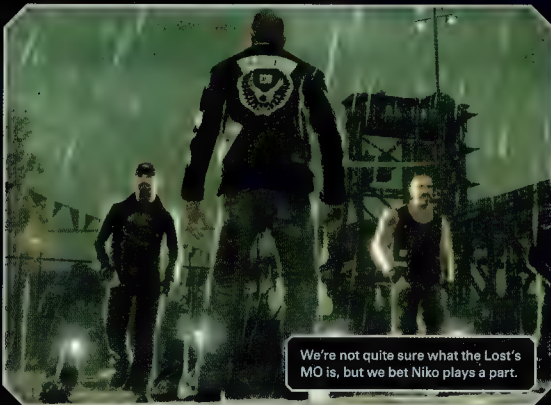
Even though Sony has made a few comments to the contrary, it seems as though "The Lost and the Damned" is an Xbox 360-exclusive expansion right now. We'll find out more about that situation and the details of the expansion in the weeks preceding the release of this content, but it just can't come soon enough for us.



The Lost roll in packs, which should make combat much different.



Johnny Klebitz and his cohorts are unlike any GTA protagonists before.



We're not quite sure what the Lost's MO is, but we bet Niko plays a part.

ALSO CHECK OUT:



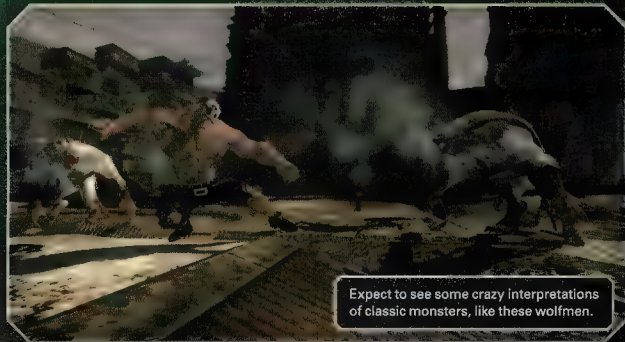
RIDE 2 HELL

If you just can't get enough of the rough and tumble motorcycle action of *The Lost and the Damned*, you should consider taking a *Ride 2 Hell*. This sandbox title is set in the 1960s and follows the exploits of a West Coast motorcycle gang. Instead of packed city streets, *Ride 2 Hell* takes place on the open, dusty highways of 1960s California. Should make for some interesting fights.

MOST PHOTOGENIC

SPLATTERHOUSE

The old-school biker series returns with a high-doll makeover.



Expect to see some crazy interpretations of classic monsters, like these wolfmen.



Splatterhouse's up-close combat should highlight its... unique enemies.

Met Rick. Rick wasn't always a large, shirtless man with a creepy mask and bloodcurdling strength. He used to be an average college student. He had a suitably attractive girlfriend named Jennifer and majored in the rather morbid field of necrobiology. He even had a favorite professor, stereotypically named Dr. West.

Unsurprisingly, Rick's professor screwed him over. Dr. West decided to open a few portals to a dimension filled with gruesome demon-things called Corrupted. They bloodied him up and kidnapped Jennifer, and had he not stumbled across the aforementioned creepy mask, he probably would have died.

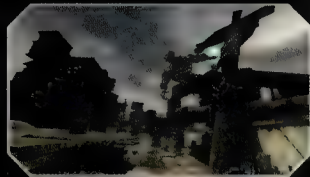
Now, Rick is very muscular and very angry. With the power of his mask, he can crush skulls between his hands and send blood flying in glorious fountains of red mist. He can dismember enemies with a flick of the wrist. He's even gotten into sports, throwing fastballs with people's heads and swinging at pitches with dismembered arms. Best of all, Rick can survive pretty much anything. Flaying the flesh from his bones won't slow him for long; the mask enables him

to regenerate limbs, restore muscle and sinew, and re-grow lost organs with just a few seconds of rest and a dash of necrotic energy harvested from the dead.

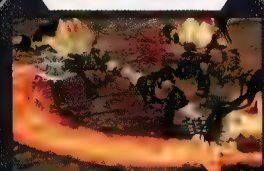
If it all sounds a bit too familiar, that's because it's all been done before—literally. Two decades ago, Namco released *Splatterhouse*, a classic side-scrolling beat-'em-up with a bloody reputation. It was popular enough to spawn a pair of sequels before it disappeared into history; excepting a virtual console release, no-one has heard much about *Splatterhouse* for 15 years.

Well, those 15 years are up, and Rick is back. BottleRocket Entertainment is developing a remake that meshes all the grit of the original arcade game with all the glory of today's console generation. That means Havok physics, destructible environments, and enemies that gib into useful body parts. Need a weapon in a pinch? Just smash a Corrupted into a nearby wall, watch the grisly fireworks, grab some bony "confetti," and go to town.

Would our parents approve? Probably not. But *Splatterhouse* is shaping up to be so spectacularly over-the-top, we can't wait to see the gore fly.



ALSO CHECK OUT:



BRUTAL LEGEND

If *Splatterhouse* isn't enough to quench your thirst for blood-drenched action, look no further than *Brütal Legend*. It's been pushed back more than a few times, but 2009 should finally see the day that Tim Schafer's bloody biker epic is unleashed. Abandon hope, all ye demons who feast on the soul of rock!

CONTINUED ▶

STAR OCEAN: THE LAST HOPE

Square Enix's overlooked RPG hopes to be the next Final Fantasy.

It is a blend of science fiction and the utterly fantastic, a place where asteroids and comets surface from nebulae-like mountain peaks poking through thick clouds. In the aftermath of an apocalyptic World War III, humanity made first contact with beings from another planet. With their help, the survivors devised deep space travel and warp drive, and within a few dozen years had begun to journey to the farthest reaches of space.

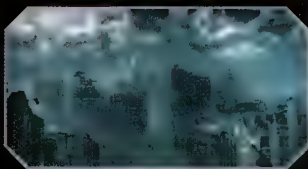
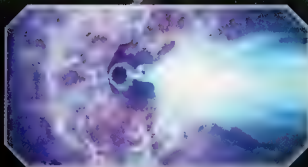
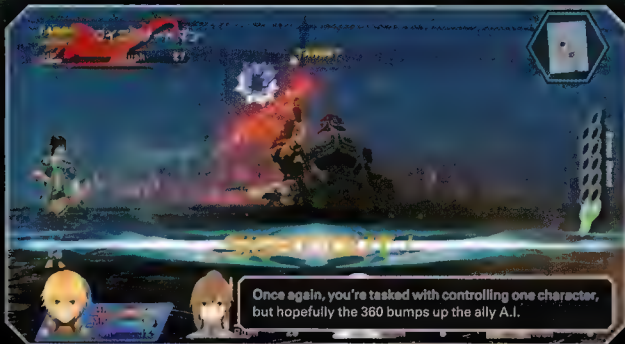
This is the history of Star Ocean. It's the groundwork on which an entire franchise is laid, and it's being fully told for the first time in The Last Hope. Earlier games in the series took place over 300 years after the war, when Earthling and alien cultures had long since intermingled. Star Ocean: Till the End of Time even closed out the story, effectively shutting the door on potential sequels. Now The Last Hope is opening that door up one more time to reveal how it all came together.

There's a whole lot of history to cover: developer tri-Ace has been making Star Ocean games for 12 years. The franchise prides itself on its unique combination of real-time combat and classic JRPG gameplay. But the original Star

Ocean wasn't even released in the U.S., and English ports of its sequels suffered from confusing plot development and god-awful voice acting. The games never found a home in the hearts of western fans.

tri-Ace wants that to change. The Last Hope is the first Star Ocean game to be released on the current generation of consoles, and the Japanese developer is absolutely determined to make it more than just a prequel. They're bringing every ounce of the Xbox 360's computing power to bear in rendering vistas as gorgeous as have ever been made on the system, and taking meticulous care to make the gameplay equally exceptional. Characters will get Rush gauges that can be used to execute special moves in real time, and in a series-first, players will be able to take direct control of their starships. It's goodbye to crappy story translations and hello to a polished and well-acted script. It is, in short, a final and brilliant revival of a universe that we westerners never really knew.

Rarely has a game been more aptly named. We're crossing our fingers and hoping and against hope that this Star Ocean will be everything we want it to be.



ALSO CHECK OUT:

FINAL FANTASY XIII

Questing in space not your style? 2009 will play host to a slew of superb JRPGs, none with higher expectations than Final Fantasy XIII. With a re-envisioned Active Time Battle system and the rise of a new heroine in the vein of Cloud Strife, FF13 promises to once again reshape the face of RPGs.



F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN

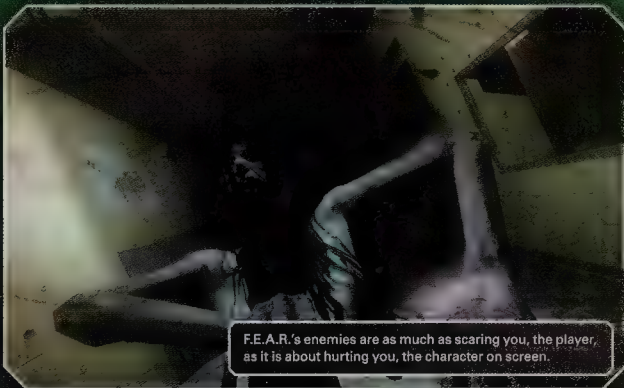
Alma is back with a fearsome vengeance to bring supernatural wrath and pain.

The first F.E.A.R. shocked first-person shooter gamers with horrific imagery, bloody shootouts, and razor-sharp action sequences. Most notably known for the little girl in the red dress, it was revealed that that little girl, Alma, had powerful psychic abilities and externally threatened national security. That's why you were brought in as "Point Man" of the First Encounter Assault Recon team, to disband the Armacham Technology Corporation from using Alma's genes to clone a powerful army of Replicant psychic soldiers. In the end, Alma's pissed-off paranormal spirit is released and you discover that your character is her son; moments later only to be blasted in the face with a nuclear explosion.

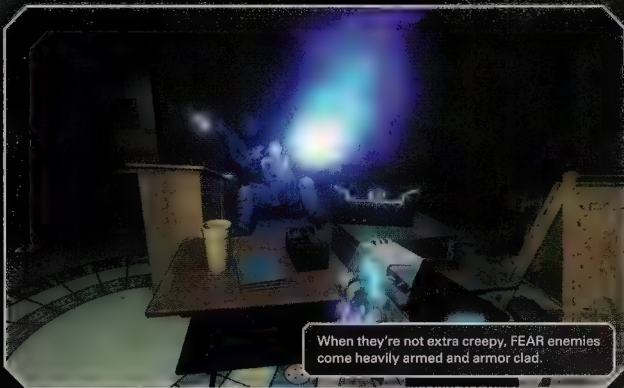
So where does that leave us with F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin? A clean slate means a new protagonist, you play as Michael Becket, Alma is still on the loose, and an even deeper plot. Project Origin actually starts 30 minutes before the nuclear conclusion of the first game. You pick up and play at this point with Becket's Delta Force squad on a mission to arrest the president of Armacham, Genevieve Aristide. The same nuclear bomb explodes, Aristide slips away, and you get sent to the hospital where you're equipped with the same hyper-reflexive actions as the "Point Man" from the first game.

These hyper reflexes allow you to slow time to dodge bullets, shoot grenades in midair, but also open a paranormal channel between you and Alma. This is where the Japanese-inspired horror elements come into play as Becket is relentlessly haunted by visions of Alma and her wrath. You may recall a certain terrifying vision from the first game that presented Alma walking on a blood-stained ceiling as tears of red dripped down the walls. Prepare to experience even more frightening moments than that in F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin.

It's no surprise that F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin is coming along well for its February release date. The graphics are just as good as the first game, complete with slow-motion bullet ripples, sizzling particle effects, and plenty of blood splattering. Needless to say, Project Origin is the perfect follow-up to the critically acclaimed, yet paranormally insane F.E.A.R.



F.E.A.R.'s enemies are as much as scaring you, the player, as it is about hurting you, the character on screen.



When they're not extra creepy, FEAR enemies come heavily armed and armor clad.

ALSO CHECK OUT:

BIOSHOCK 2: SEA OF DREAMS

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin is most like BioShock 2 in the fact that they're both first-person shooters with a tight focus on atmosphere and horror. Obviously, F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin leans more on the horrific, supernatural side with its blood-spurting enemies and creepy child star Alma, and not to mention the word "fear" in its title.



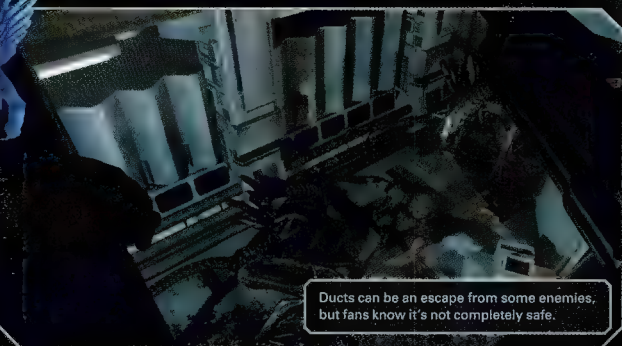
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ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

Are these Aliens becoming an endangered species?



Keeping new xenomorphs from entering the world is almost as important as eliminating the ones alive.



Ducts can be an escape from some enemies, but fans know it's not completely safe.

Aliens are a sneaky group. Like ninjas of outer space, they sneak onto the scene and harass helpless humans without even being noticed. The development of the latest Aliens title has also been a bit of a mystery, with rare drops of information trickling out like blood through an air vent. Here is a status update on the gameplay, and new information on the game's mysterious development cycle.

Our latest look at the gameplay has featured a few cool new elements that make the game uniquely Alien-ish. We got to see video of combat with a spry xenomorph, the signature big-headed alien that adorns every movie, comic, or videogame. The xenomorph started combat on the ground, running up an adjacent wall until it reached the ceiling. Unfortunately for the alien, the player tracked it expertly with his pulse rifle, leaving the xenomorph lifeless in a pool of its toxic green blood. We also got to see the hand-held motion trackers at work. Held in the character's left hand as he gripped a pistol in his right, it allowed the player to get a bead on aliens hiding

in the darkness, providing a much more focused and fast-paced radar system than we've seen in games like Halo. It's only brief snippets of the single-player game, but it looks like a solid foundation for the game's development.

Speaking of development, the game has been mired in a bit of controversy of late. Recent reports have stated that Gearbox Software has laid off a number of employees over the last few months, ranging from 30 to upwards of 50. Subpar sales of the team's *Brothers in Arms* series has been chief to blame, with some speculating that Aliens might be getting cancelled as a result. Fortunately, Gearbox President Randy Pitchford assuaged our fears, stating "Aliens isn't canned. The true relevance of the story will actually be irrelevant until we release our next game [most likely *Borderlands*], at which time I hope there will be a lot of interest in what we've done that can produce such results."

With our interest in this game at already lethally high levels, we can't wait for new information for this game to sneak onto our motion trackers.

ALSO CHECK OUT:

TERMINATOR SALVATION

TERMINATOR: SALVATION

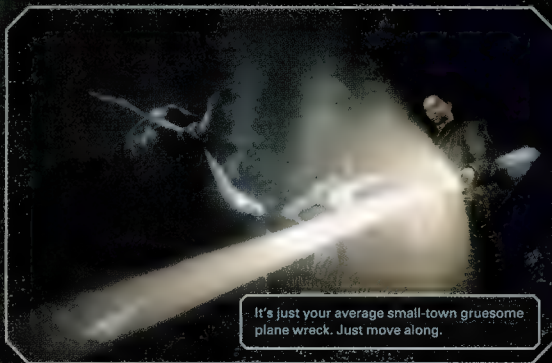
We're as hyped as anyone to see *Terminator: Salvation* hit the silver screen, particularly after the bad taste *Rise of the Machines* and its video game tie-ins have left in our mouth. Thankfully, like Christian Bale bringing gravitas to the role of John Connor, the development team, GRIN Studios has a deep pedigree too. With the expertise used to create great upcoming shooters like *Bionic Commando* and *Wanted: Weapons of Fate*, GRIN's a great team to wage the war against the machines.

ALAN WAKE

Microsoft's newest IP lurches out of the shadows.



Your flashlight's more than just a tool of exploration—it's a weapon.



It's just your average small-town gruesome plane wreck. Just move along.

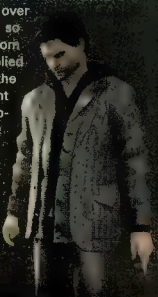


Some of the townspeople are just as creepy as the game's enemies.

After months of silence, we're finally getting some sweet new details about the next big series to come from Microsoft. Alan Wake, the new psychological thriller action title being developed by Remedy Entertainment (of Max Payne fame) has all the makings of a blockbuster movie, mixing high-octane shooting of games like Gears of War with the creepily ambiguous ambience of titles like Silent Hill, Indigo Prophecy and Heavy Rain.

The masterful storytelling of Alan Wake's adventure seeps through the game's latest video. The well-known yet tortured horror author tries to start anew in a small town called Bright Falls, where even the small town's populace is familiar with the celebrity. Unfortunately, this form of familiarity breeds something even worse than contempt, as the trailer turns dark and foreboding. Apparently, everything that the horror author writes has come to pass, and his prose ain't exactly The Babysitter's Club. As shots of small bright creatures emerging from dark hallways are interspersed with Wake running from dangerous explosions, it becomes apparent that this game will toe the line between thriller and survival horror like none other. It's all capped with the soothing voice of a woman (possibly Wake's missing wife) waking Alan.

The gameplay is an even more mysterious than the plot at this point. Remedy's bread and butter over the last decade has been Max Payne, so we'd bet that the shooting takes cues from that title, but with a new-gen sheen applied over it. There's a heavy emphasis on the use of light, as Wake often has a flashlight in hand with a handgun in the other. Apparently, many enemies in the game will have a weakness to light, making the oft-useless item an integral part of combat. Additionally, traversing the environment to stay near brightly lit areas will add a layer of strategy (and fear). We're glad to see Alan Wake rise from its development slumber and can't wait to find out more about this unique thriller.



ALSO CHECK OUT:



VELVET ASSASSIN

This isn't your average WWII game. Velvet Assassin is a stealth action title starring a female protagonist. Between the use of morphine, a heavy stealth element and its blending of fact and fiction, Velvet Assassin is worth a closer look. The heroine of the game, Violette Summers, is based on a real-life WWII spy, Violette Szabo. Velvet Assassin is by no means historically accurate, but Szabo's story makes a great launching point for what could turn out to be an interesting cult title.

CONTINUED ►

WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

There's nothing weak or ineffectual about this balls-to-the-walls shooter.



Angelina Jolie burned up the screen as a mysterious, sexy assassin in *Wanted* the movie. But it was James McAvoy with his Milquetoast-turned-badass hitman role as Wesley Gibson who stole the show. The movie featured an incredible visual style with remarkable special effects and heavy-hitting action. Warner Bros. jumped on the opportunity to make a game out of the movie's slow-motion, bullet-curving effects that translates to awesome gameplay better than you might think.

The story of *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* picks up exactly where *Wanted* the movie left off, with Wesley Gibson awakening in the same chair he

was sitting in when the movie ended. So the game is a direct sequel in essence, and borrows certain cinematic scenes from the movie and takes those sequences to the next level. For example, one of the final segments in the movie is an over-the-top shootout on a high-speed train that ends with an epic fall down a cliffside. In the video game, developer GRIN has taken that same concept but applied it to an airplane. We bet even the movie director, the visionary Timur Bekmambetov, wished he'd have thought of that.

In *Wanted: Weapons of Fate*, you play as Wesley Gibson, who is now a full-fledged assassin and possibly the best in the world. The core gameplay involves a lot of shooting, for which Wesley is well-equipped with customized dual pistols, an advanced cover system that allows you to smoothly transition around sharp corners and dash to other cover points, and visceral one-hit melee combat.

And then there are Wesley's special assassin abilities that allow you to curve bullets around obstacles, smash bullets together in mid-stream to create an explosive shrapnel death trap, and slow time. The ability to curve bullets is the most satisfying skill in the game, and unlike anything we've ever seen in a shooter before.

Wanted: Weapons of Fate seems to be one of the quieter titles in the media at the moment. But we're positive this action-packed shooter is going to blow up huge in the coming months as the game ramps up to launch in 2009. Based on alpha builds and early software, the graphics are already crisp and in-your-face with more chunky blood than a *Gears of War 2* multiplayer match. The bullet-time effects and abilities push the envelope for all shooters. And the story is guaranteed to be an action thrill ride if it's anything like the movie.



Wanted's close-quarters melee combat should be especially brutal and cinematic.

ALSO CHECK OUT:



EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD

Wanted: Weapons of Fate is most like *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard*, but without the humor. In fact, the two games' storylines are on complete opposite ends of the spectrum; however, the gameplay mechanics are nearly identical. Both games are third-person shooters with heavy emphasis on gunplay and using cover.



We're not sure how a car busts through an airplane's cargo, but we're glad it's there.

WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH

Play the year's most anticipated movie without buying a disc!



Rorschach's attacks are up-close and brutal. We're talking some forceful fists to the face.

As fervent fans of the famed comic series, we've been watching the development of the upcoming movie, and now, this game with great anticipation. Whereas the movie has caught the attention of the comic's fans due to its bombastic high production values and HD sheen, the video game tie-in, entitled *Watchmen: The End Is Nigh*, is turning heads due to its decidedly low-key release, which just may work in the game's favor.

The first shocking element is that the game will be online-download only, and episodic at that. While some would see that as a sales-prohibiting element, we think that this game's core audience—*Watchmen* comic fans—is the kind of hardcore fanbase that would seek out a digital download. Additionally, the episodic nature should work wonders, since *The End Is Nigh* serves as a prequel to the comic series. If the game catches on, we could take part in many never-before-seen chapters of this amazing superhero saga.

Another surprise comes in the limited scope of the game—it's a brawler that features just two of the comic's many memorable heroes. In *The End Is Nigh*, you have the choice between Rorschach, the demented detective with a powerful punch sack for a mask, or Nite Owl II, a gadget-utilizing technical fighter. The two have wildly varying styles in true brawler tradition, which should allow for some fun fighting action. We'd gladly take trading off between our two favorite *Watchmen* than having Dr. Manhattan and the Comedian share the same moveset.

The more we see of it, the more *Watchmen* reminds us of another excellent movie-based game. Like Rookstar did with *The Warriors*, Deadline Games is presenting an artfully done new chapter of a highly-revered franchise. The end is indeed nigh; the end of our extreme anticipation for this almost-but title.

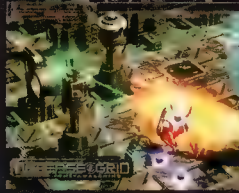


Nite Owl's electric suit isn't a crowd-killer, but you can use it to keep a group beat-down from getting out of hand.

ALSO CHECK OUT:

DEFENSE GRID: THE AWAKENING

Here's another high-end game you can download come 2009. Hidden Path Entertainment is putting the finishing touches on its "high-end tower defense game" known as *Defense Grid: The Awakening*. *Defense Grid* takes its basic cues from classics like *PixelJunk Monsters*, but the production values are far more visually arresting, presented with slick 3D graphics. Your goal is to protect energy cores from oncoming hordes of freaky aliens by building and upgrading towers that fire lasers, flames, meteors, electricity, missiles, and enemy-slowing temporal fields.



CONTINUED ▶

BIGGEST BRAIN

HALO WARS

Why Halo's biggest battle is shaping up to be one of the series' best.



A full-page action illustration from a Halo magazine. In the foreground, a UNSC tank is shown from a low angle, with the letters 'UNSC' clearly visible on its side. A Spartan in full combat armor stands on top of the tank, holding a large, multi-barreled weapon. The background is filled with smoke and the silhouette of another UNSC vehicle, possibly a Warthog, with 'UNSC' also visible on its side. The overall color palette is dominated by yellows, oranges, and greys, creating a sense of intense battle.

NEW DETAILS ON THE FLOOD,
THE ARBITER, AND SPARTANS!

CONTINUED ►



Meet the new Atriox: a vicious, genocidal criminal.

With *Halo Wars*, veteran developer Ensemble Studios took on an impossible mission: creating an Xbox 360-only strategy game that appeals to both Halo players and RTS fans, two factions known for their fanatical devotion to detail. Luckily for Xbox 360 owners, it's looking more and more like Ensemble Studios has indeed pulled off the impossible, and the results may reverberate for years to come.

STRATEGY SOLUTIONS

From the opening moments of the game, everything about *Halo Wars* simply screams "polish." The eye-popping introductory cinema, created by the industry legends at Blur Studio, sets the stage for an epic confrontation between humanity and the fanatical alien race called the Covenant. We learn that the Covenant conquered the once-lush world of Harvest, and that the UNSC marines spent five long, bloody years fighting to reclaim it. Humanity prevailed, for the moment, but at what cost? Now, a new group of Covenant interlopers have secretly landed on Harvest, and are planning to excavate an ancient artifact buried in the ice. Halo fans will immediately recognize the artifact as a Forerunner structure, left behind by a race of long-extinct, all-powerful beings. Though the Covenant's goal with the artifact is unclear, the UNSC Spirit of Fire deploys its troops to investigate and drive off the Covenant invaders.



FLOOD OF DETAILS

Four new Flood forms you'll fight in *Halo Wars*.

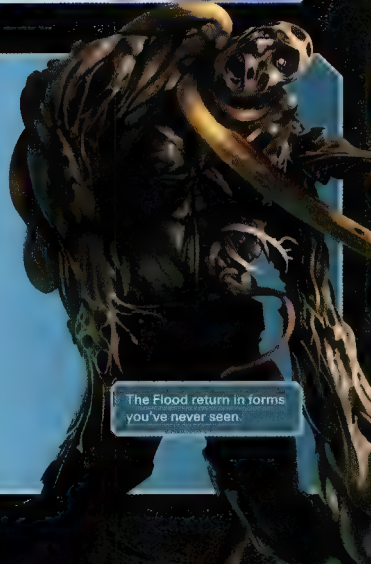
At the moment, we know of four different versions of the Flood that will appear in *Halo Wars*, though the final version is sure to include more. Here's an early sampling.

Flood Pods look like harmless growths, and shooting them will sometimes cough up precious resources you can cash in for weapon upgrades or vehicles. But other times, shooting a Flood Pod will unleash a mob of infectors that can corrupt your nearby squads in seconds. Cash in, or risk cashing out? That's the eternal question you'll face when fighting in Flood-controlled environments.

Infection forms are the small, spore-like creatures you remember from the other Halo games. But *Halo Wars* is promising to pump out unprecedented numbers of infection forms, which will quickly overwhelm your armies in a seething mass of tentacles. Troops who are overwhelmed by the infection forms will become full-blown Flood carriers.

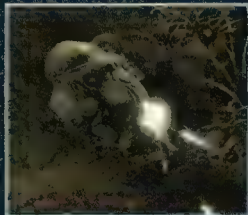
Flood Swarms are the first-ever-seen flying incarnation of the Flood, and were described by Ensemble Studios team members as "infected buzzards crossed with evil bats." These nasty suckers travel in teeming airborne packs, and can emit barb-like projectiles to puncture enemies. But Ensemble Studios team members told us that these airborne aggressors aren't the only flying Flood forms in *Halo Wars*—there's a much larger and deadlier creature that remains clouded in secrecy.

Flood Barracks are organic structures that ceaselessly churn out a variety of Flood attackers. They can't be destroyed by conventional weaponry, but you can damage them enough to force them into a withered dormant state. The effect is only temporary, though, and given enough time the Barracks will recover and begin producing more Flood forms.



The Flood return in forms you've never seen.

HALO WARS



UNKNOWN FLOOD FORM:

We have no idea what this gigantic, floating, globular Flood unit is, but we're betting it's nasty as hell. Kill it with fire!



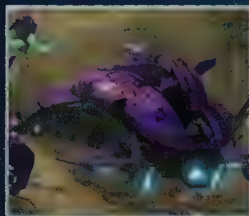
LOCUST:

A never-before-seen Covenant walker unit that excels at crushing enemy structures. By enhancing your technology level you can divert the Locust's shield generator to its weaponry, overcharging its plasma beam for additional damage.



GRUNTS:

Low-cost Covenant foot soldiers that can overwhelm the enemy with sheer numbers. Though inferior to the UNSC's Marine units, the Grunts can upgrade to Needlers in order to inflict much more damage.



WRAITH:

This signature Covenant tank packs a powerful plasma mortar launcher that suffers from limited range. In Halo Wars, Wraiths are particularly effective against infantry and small vehicles.

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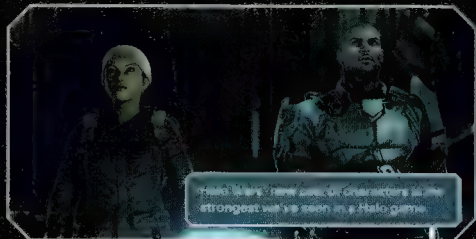


Upon playing the first level of *Halo Wars*, you'll immediately see why the game is likely to rewrite the rules of the strategy genre. For starters, the core fighting forces in *Halo Wars* are instantly recognizable to millions of gamers thanks to their starring role in the first three *Halo* games. This fact boosts *Halo Wars*' accessibility because you won't need to be introduced to obscure new vehicles and how they function—you likely already know based on your experiences in the other *Halo* games. Most important of all, the control system is sleek and refined, cutting out the fussy details and obsessive-compulsive micromanagement that would weigh down what must remain a fast-paced, highly accessible experience for console players. In fact, we'd go so far as to say that *Halo Wars*' controls are already vastly superior to any other console strategy game. But that doesn't mean the strategy component is watered down; rather, it's been

intelligently streamlined. For example, all armies in *Halo Wars* depend on a single, self-renewing global resource. Furthermore, equipment or vehicle upgrades will affect your entire army at once, not just one unit at a time. It's a refreshingly simple, accessible approach that has been long overdue in the overburdened strategy genre. Far from being a dumbed-down approach to strategy, *Halo Wars* feels like a natural, intelligent evolution of the genre.

It's no stretch to say that *Halo Wars* is turning heads within the game industry. At a recent showcase event in San Francisco, *GamePro*'s Sid Shuman spoke with *Halo Wars* lead designer and writer Graeme Devine to learn exclusive details about the game's campaign and multiplayer modes, as well as gain new insights into some of the game's best-kept secrets. What we learned only made us hungrier to play the final version of the game, which is due out this February.

Jackals are Covenant raptors who can be equipped with impenetrable deflector shields.





NEW FACES OF HALO

Halo Wars writer Graeme Devine introduces the coolest Halo cast yet.

CPT. CUTTER

"I wanted a character who could offer the 'big picture' view," Devine says of the Spirit of Fire's commander. Far from being a grizzled war veteran, Captain Cutter is a family man who is thrust into extraordinary circumstances. "He's not in charge of a destroyer or a battleship, but the Spirit of Fire. He's one of the guys who brings water to the battle lines and distributes supplies to the troops," Devine continues. Cutter reluctantly agrees to investigate the Covenant's presence on Harvest at the prodding of Professor Anders.



PROFESSOR ANDERS

"She is perhaps the foremost expert on the Covenant," Devine explains of this influential researcher, "and she has begun investigating 100,000 year-old structures, signs of [the Forerunners]." Anders is the most mysterious character in Halo Wars, and often seems to wield more power and authority than Cpt. Cutter himself. Anders provides the forward momentum in the storyline, frequently putting herself (and the Spirit of Fire) in jeopardy to learn more about alien civilizations.



THE ARBITER

The leader of the Covenant forces in Halo Wars, this Arbiter is an entirely different beast than the noble avenger depicted in Halo 2 and 3. "He's the James Bond villain in the game," Devine says, "and he's definitely insane." After spending years in a maximum-security prison "for crimes committed against the Covenant," the Prophets selected this Arbiter to lead the assault against humanity partly due to his proven cruelty and viciousness. The Arbiter is your direct nemesis in the campaign, and he's far from a military strategist—he's more like an unleashed, rabid pit bull. "He's hard to control, a crazy choice," Devine adds, "but the Covenant needed a leader who wouldn't ask too many questions." Judging by our experiences, this Arbiter is shaping up to be a memorably nutso villain, snarling out commands and gnashing his razor-sharp teeth in the campaign cut-scenes.



SGT. FORGE

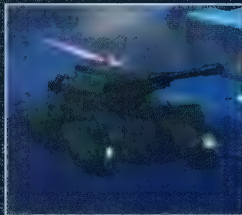
The battle-scarred leader of the UNSC military presence on Harvest, Sgt. Forge is "basically Bruce Willis from *Armageddon*," Devine says with a laugh. "Forge is a hard character, but he's not Sgt. Johnson—he has faults. He could've been a colonel, but because he's spent a tenth of his life in prison for fighting officers, he's never, ever going to advance beyond being a sergeant." Sgt. Forge is a powerful hero unit in the campaign—if he falls in battle, you'll have to send troops to revive him.



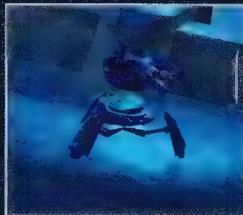
BRUTES

Twenty years prior to their starring role in Halo 3, the Brutes were banished to the lowest rung of the Covenant's hierarchical society. "The Brutes messed up in their initial attack on Harvest," Devine explains. "Brutes aren't even allowed to pilot spaceships at this point in time—they've got all the crappy jobs." You'll be able to deploy Chopper-riding Brutes when playing as the Covenant in Skirmish matches, but Devine also hinted that Brutes will factor into the campaign, performing "the last job you'd ever want to do in the armed forces." Grunt latrine duty?

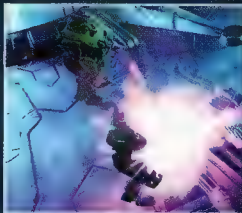
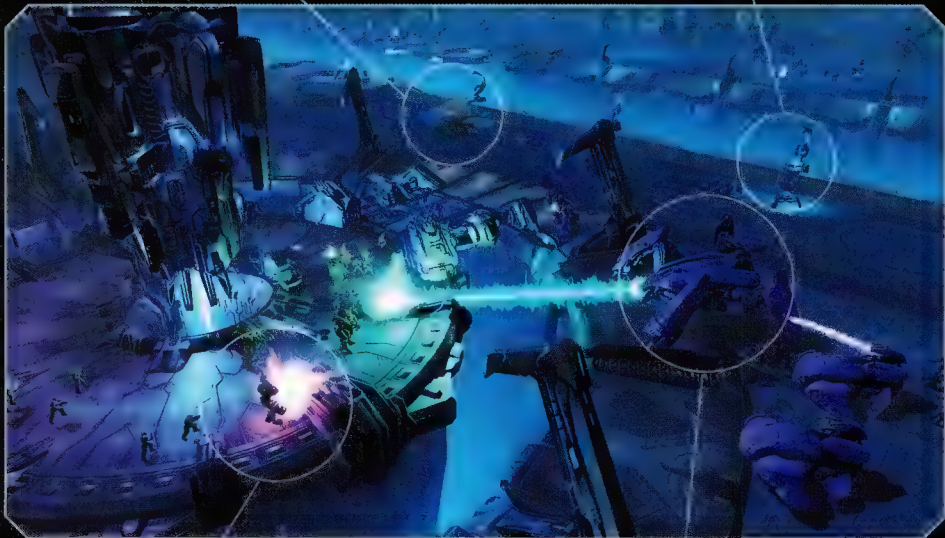
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**SCORPION:**

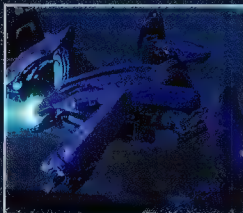
This powerful UNSC tank can dish out, and absorb, big damage. But a more powerful uber-unit, the Grizzly tank, packs a devastating double-barreled cannon and room-shredding flak mortars—it's intoxicatingly powerful.

**PLASMA TURRET:**

This Covenant turret is one of many stationary guns in Halo Wars. The UNSC gun turrets are found guarding military bases, can be upgraded to add anti-infantry fire strikes, anti-vehicle Gauss cannons, or anti-aircraft rockets.

**CYCLOPS:**

A new UNSC vehicle that specializes in destroying structures. The Cyclops can lope across the map with alarming speed, and is perfect for harassing your enemy's undefended home base.

**SCARAB:**

The ultimate Covenant vehicle, the Scarab can melt hordes of enemies with its plasma cutter but is extremely costly to construct. UNSC players can call down a MAC cannon strike from the Spirit of Fire, at great cost, to fell the Scarab quickly.

SECRETS OF THE FLOOD

One of the longest-kept secrets in the Halo universe will finally be revealed. Halo Wars will shed new light onto the origins of the Flood, the plague of parasitic, body-snatching E.T.s who crashed the party in all three previous Halo games. At this stage in the Halo universe timeline, the Flood intelligence Gravemind does not yet exist. "The Flood are not yet in their 'pure form,'" Devine elaborates, "so they're still in an earlier stage of development, more like what you experienced in Halo 1." Halo Wars will depict the very first time humanity encountered this corrosive alien force, and how the Flood escaped imprisonment on a native home world.

But this is no mere re-t-con. Halo Wars is adding new dimensions to these memorable monsters, dimensions that can only be tapped

in a strategy setting. Size and scale are one: players will be assaulted by never-before-seen numbers of marauding Flood forms, which will give players a glimpse at the Flood's broader combat tactics. "The Flood need to be scary," Devine explains. "It needs to be like being attacked by a swarm of Alien Queens—they need to be really, really bad." How bad? "It's the ultimate zombie problem," Devine laughs, "because if you send troops to fight the Flood, they can fall and become Flood themselves." Without careful strategizing, reckless players will find that they'll be quickly overwhelmed by what was their army. "We show the Covenant's perspective, too," Devine adds. "The Covenant are petrified of the Flood, and will stop fighting you to fight them."



THERE IS NO MOUSE

GamePro editor Sid Shuman addresses the most popular reader questions regarding Halo Wars—namely, how easy is it to play?

Q: So is Halo Wars coming to the PC?

A: No, and it never will, either, so stop asking. Ensemble Studios has repeatedly stated that Halo Wars will never see a PC release. There's every reason to believe that this game will remain an Xbox 360 game forevermore.

Q: Can I plug my USB mouse into my Xbox 360 and play it that way?

A: No, Halo Wars was designed to work with the Xbox 360 controller from the ground up. The whole game revolves around it—that's one of the reasons it works so well.

Q: But strategy games need a mouse and keyboard.

A: Hey, that wasn't a question! Actually, no, strategy games *don't* need to use a mouse and keyboard, as evidenced by the small army of Xbox 360

RTS games that paraded out in 2008. Command & Conquer 3, Red Alert 3, Supreme Commander, Universe at War, Age of Empires: Mythologies on the DS...

Q: ...but those all sucked because they had lousy controls. What makes Halo Wars any different?

A: A lot, actually. Most importantly, the button layout is simple—you can do virtually anything in the game using two or three buttons and the left analog stick. Driving, attacking, and building troops are all accomplished using the same button. Also, many of the typical strategy-game conceits are greatly simplified in Halo Wars. So rather than pump time into gathering resources and money, you can slap down a couple of generators and go back to the fun stuff: building better vehicles, upgrading your troops, and blowing stuff up. There's a lot less fussing over details and a lot more fighting in Halo Wars. It's truly the most streamlined, combat-intensive RTS game I've ever played.

Q: Sounds cool. So...when is Halo Wars coming to the PC?

A: ...S***

CONTINUED ►

**SNIPER TOWERS:**

Another small but important detail that fans will remember from the Halo shooters: UNSC or Covenant players can safely hoist sharpshooters or hero units to this suspended platform and keep them (relatively) safe.

**HUNTERS:**

These super-tough Covenant units always work in pairs, and are best described as walking tanks. Their Fuel Rod guns make quick work of vehicles and infantry, and upgrades provide massive boosts to their armor.

**BRUTES:**

Ape-like Covenant warriors who fight with Brute Shot grenade launchers and powerful Gravity Hammers. Brutes can also pilot heavy Chopper vehicles, as seen in Halo 3.

**COBRA:**

This new UNSC unit can devastate enemy heavy armor with its potent anti-vehicle rockets. It can also be deployed to fire longer-range artillery, but it's best kept off the front lines of battle.

HALO WARS

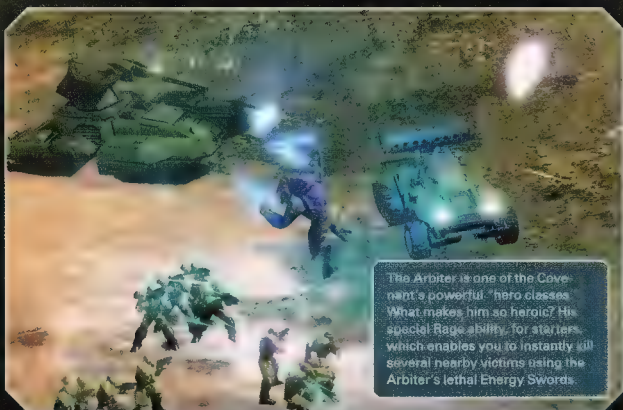
But it gets better. The Flood will factor heavily into certain one-on-one multiplayer Skirmish maps, becoming a kind of "third player" that will indiscriminately wreak havoc on both the UNSC and Covenant players. *GamePro* got an early look at a multiplayer Skirmish map called "Release," which fuses ancient Forerunner architecture with the gooey, organic growths of the Flood.

"What if the Flood had been controlling an environment for thousands of years?" Devine says of the Flood environments. "If they got desperate, what would they do to, say, trees?" When battling your opponent on the Flood-dominated environment of Release, you'll need to constantly watch your back—undefended scouting parties can be quickly consumed, then turned against you, by computer-controlled Flood entities. Even better, the Forerunner facility houses captive Flood that were used for research purposes countless years before. In multiplayer matches, you can capture one of two control panels found on the map, then spend resources to unleash the captive Flood on your attackers...if they don't turn on you first!

THE BEST DEFENSE

And what would a Halo game be without a major focus on online multiplayer? Halo Wars will offer two-player online cooperative play through the story-driven campaign mode, as well as one-on-one Skirmish multiplayer battles. As for other online play modes, such as Halo standby Capture the Flag, Ensemble Studios' lead designer remains tight-lipped. "It's very important to be a Halo game," Devine teased. "There will be more than one way to play a Skirmish game," he smirked, offering no further details.

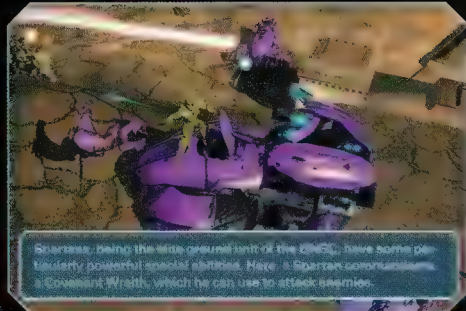
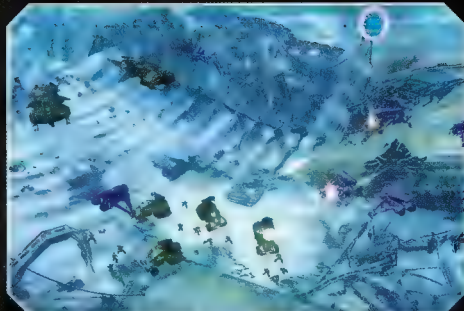
No matter. We're already convinced. Halo Wars looks to be the real deal, a genre-shattering game that will likely appeal to a staggeringly wide audience, from action players to open-minded strategy veterans. The campaign storyline and cinematics alone are better than anything we've seen in previous Halo games, and the action is blisteringly fast-paced and addictive. In short, it will take more than the vocal complaints of a few RTS snobs to take the fight out of this promising game. We look forward to the final product with great interest—it has the potential to go the distance.



The Arbiter is one of the Covenant's powerful "hero classes." What makes him so heroic? His special Rage ability, for starters, which enables you to instantly kill several nearby victims using the Arbiter's lethal Energy Swords.



The visually spectacular environment is set on the tropical world of Arcadia. And yes, this is a shot of real gameplay—the home/arena-looking game.



Spies are, being the elite ground units of the UNSC, have some particularly powerful special abilities. Here, a Spartan commando uses a Covenant Warthog, which he can use to attack enemies.

CONTINUED ▶



In Halo 3: ODST, you'll control a new character called "the Rookie." This Orbital Drop Shock Trooper (ODST) awakens after a hard landing to find his team members missing—it's up to you to find out what happened.

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

HALO 3: ODST

Bungie's big secret finally gets revealed—just don't call it "Recon."

Bungie's back, and their new project may be their most ambitious yet. Formerly called "Halo 3: Recon," this standalone expansion to Halo 3 will introduce a new character (The Rookie), a new story-driven campaign, and oodles of new high-tech gear. *GamePro's* Sid Shuman reached out to the writer and creative director of Halo 3: ODST, Joseph Staten, for an inside look into one of 2009's most anticipated games.

GamePro: Halo 3: ODST is the first Halo game to not feature a playable Master Chief. Will The Rookie ever bump into the Chief? Or see evidence of his handiwork?

Joseph Staten: No, you won't ever meet the Chief. Basically, Halo 3: ODST happens while the Chief is away from Earth—after he leaves for the "Delta Halo" in Halo 2 and before he crashes into the jungle at the start of Halo 3. ODST doesn't cover all the Chief's absence. But it does fill a very interesting part of that gap.

GP: Is there a villain in this new storyline?

JS: Yes, but like the Chief, the Rookie never meets him. Put that in your speculation pipe and smoke it, Halo fans!

GP: How does the Rookie's silenced SMG work from a gameplay perspective? Is there a stealth mechanic in Halo 3: ODST?

JS: The silenced SMG is just one of the tweaks to the Halo 3 sandbox that make ODST a stealthier experience—one that, at least in the open environment of nighttime New Mombasa, rewards a more measured approach to combat. As a non-Spartan, you'll need to be careful about the fights you pick, especially when you're on your own. Luckily the silenced SMG excels at dropping unwary, unshielded enemies.

GP: Are you planning to include any other new weapons, or modifications to existing weapons?

JS: Because ODST leverages the Halo 3 sandbox, there will be a lot of returning weapon favorites. But given the game's position on the Halo timeline, we're also bringing back...Well, on second thought, I'd ruin a lot of the game's fun if I got too specific. So let me just say that we're absolutely expanding the sandbox in critical areas.

GP: Compared to their appearances in Halo 3, the Brutes in Halo 3: ODST look more vicious and evil. Have they received any new behaviors or combat tactics?

JS: Paul Bertone, ODST's design director, has conceived a new "cover first" tactic for the Brutes that makes them even more interesting to fight. And when I say "interesting" I mean downright nasty. Brutes in ODST are much more interested in self-preservation than they were in Halo 3 which makes for terrific, multi-layered encounters. They'll lure you into traps, gang up on you—generally make you wish you'd hit them in the flanks instead of hard-charging, Spartan-style.

GP: How does the Rookie's high-tech visor work? And what are those pretty colors and highlights we saw in the teaser trailer?

JS: We're still tweaking the visuals, but it's basically a low-light vision enhancement and target acquisition mode. It's most basic function is to highlight enemies in red and allies in green, but it's also extremely helpful for navigation. Objects of interest—the "clues" that advance the story—also get special vision-mode treatment.

GP: The open-world element in Halo 3: ODST is an interesting addition. Will players be able to choose which of the four beacons they explore first? Can you explore them in any order you like?

HALO 3

ODST



You'll guide the Buckle through New Mombasa, battling the Covenant invaders. As a Spartan, you'll be able to relive your favorite moments in a new gameplay flashback.



JS: Again, I don't want to ruin any surprises, but I can clarify a misstatement in [a recent Game Informer] article. There are actually more than four beacons, and once you find the first one you're pretty much free to roam the dark, Covenant-patrolled streets of New Mombasa however you like—free to find the remaining clue beacons in any order you choose.

GP: When playing Halo 3: ODST, how does the feel of the game differ from playing as a supersoldier such as Master Chief?

JS: A lot more tactical, which is to say you need to think before you engage—decide how you want to take apart an encounter before diving in or you'll get into trouble pretty quick, especially on higher difficulty levels. Unlike a Spartan, an ODST doesn't have shields. You're a little slower too, so if you get hit you can't just sprint to safety. The golden rule of ODST combat is "look before you leap."

GP: Will Halo 3: ODST include any new multiplayer maps or online features? And will the multiplayer game feature the traditional Spartans, or playable ODST characters?

JS: Halo 3: ODST will include a variety of new multiplayer maps that apply to Halo 3. Some of these maps are actually part of the Mythic Map Pack that will initially be released on Xbox LIVE Marketplace early next year. This multiplayer content is "Halo 3" in nature, meaning you will not be playing Slayer, CTF or other traditional favorites as anything other than a Spartan or Elite.

In addition, the core ODST campaign can still be experienced cooperatively with up to four players, including saved films, screenshots, campaign scoring and all the great functionality Halo fans have come to enjoy. Beyond that, we're keeping mum on any other multiplayer components of Halo 3: ODST.

GP: There are still plenty of active Halo 3 players on Xbox Live. Will Halo 3: ODST offer any special treats for those players?

JS: The special treat we've announced thus far is the opportunity to complete the "Vidmaster" achievements—a series of tasks that span Halo 3, the Halo 3 Legendary Map Pack, Mythic Map Pack and the Halo 3: ODST retail package. Upon completing the entire chain, players will finally have the ability to unlock the "Recon" armor for use in Halo 3 multiplayer.



GAME OF THE MONTH

SHIN MEGUMI TENSEI: PERSONA 4

Well, we certainly weren't expecting this: the calendar reads 2008 and the Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii are, as the kids would say, the new hawtness. So imagine our surprise when we held our monthly battle royale for Game of the Month honors and a PS2 title came away as the clear winner. Say what? Did we all fall into some sort of time warp? Are we stuck in a *Twilight Zone* episode?

We were surprised when we received not one but two PS2 titles for review consideration this month, but we were down right shocked when *Persona 4* proved to be the best title we played over the course of this issue. Granted, the holiday rush has died down, and most publishers have already released their heavy hitters. So the odds were stacked in *Persona 4*'s favor, but even during a busy month, it would have gotten serious consideration for the honor.

With a deep and engaging storyline, fantastic production values, and innovative concepts, *Persona 4* helped reignite our love of RPG games. It's a great reason to get your PS2 out of storage and PS3 owners who own systems with backwards compatibility have another quality title to add to their library. Much like the ongoing DLC boom, it's a powerful reminder that you don't need bleeding-edge hardware and a Titanic-like budget to create a compelling gaming experience.

Editorial intern Will "grayscale" Herring tumbled into the world of *Persona 4* and his full review is waiting for you on the next page, so go back to the future and see why this is one RPG you should definitely consider playing!



GAME REVIEWS:

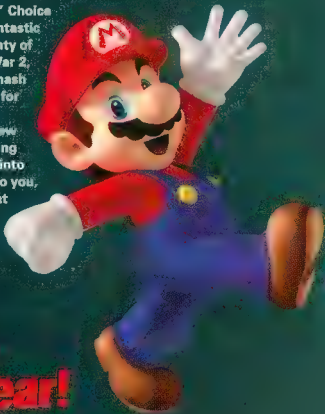
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GAMEPRO SAYS GOODBYE TO THE YEAR 2008

By the time you read this, the calendar will officially read 2009. It promises to be a great year, with some incredible releases on the near horizon. Resident Evil 5, Killzone 2, StarCraft II, Street Fighter IV, Mad World—the list goes on and on (be sure to read our comprehensive 2009 Preview Guide which ran in our December issue). But before we usher in the New Year, we wanted to take a quick look back at some of the incredible games that were released in 2008. As you no doubt saw in our Editors' Choice awards, the past year was dominated by some amazing titles. While the fantastic LittleBigPlanet won our coveted Game of the Year award, there were plenty of other games that caught our attention. Grand Theft Auto IV, Gears of War 2, Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots, Fallout 3, Dead Space, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, and Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia—it truly was a banner year for gamers everywhere.

GamePro also saw some dramatic changes with the launch of our new website and forums. There were some growing pains, but we're going stronger than ever and we've generated enough momentum to carry us into 2009 and beyond. Let us also take this moment to express our gratitude to you, the readers. Without your passion and energy, GamePro wouldn't be what it is today.

That said, please join us as we wave goodbye to the year that was. We'll see you next month with a brand new batch of reviews, previews, and features on all the upcoming games for 2009. With any luck, the coming year will be just as good as the one that just concluded!



Happy New Year!

GAMEPRO's RATING SCALE

Behind the Stars



4.5 to 5 Stars

The best of the best. If you don't own this game, you should. Think Halo, Zelda, Resident Evil, and Metal Gear Solid.



3.5 to 4 Stars

Highly enjoyable, but falls short of true greatness. The Fight Nights and Tony Hawks of the world.



2.5 to 3 Stars

Approach with caution—try before you buy. Enter the Matrix and the Dynasty Warriors games fall squarely in this category.



1.5 to 2 Stars

Should come with a sticker: "Warning, contains poisonous amounts of suckage." Remember Backyard Wrestling?

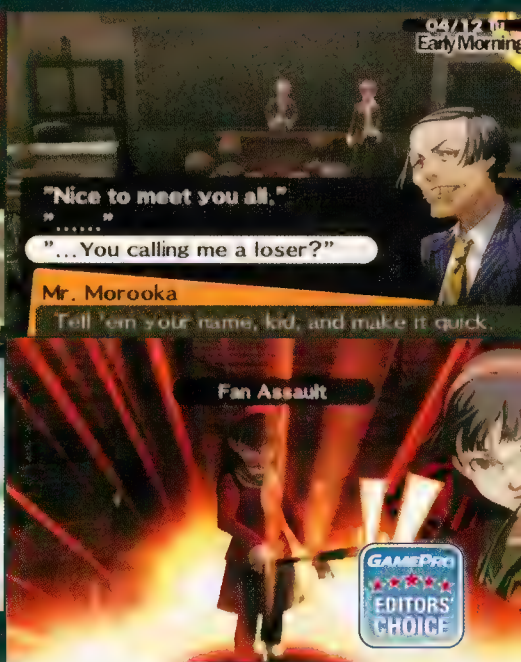


0 to 1 Star

An absolute insult to humanity. Kill it with fire and holy water.



Games that score or higher are awarded our coveted Editors' Choice Award.



Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4's story is beautifully executed through a series of gorgeous animated cutscenes.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 4

Plucky publisher Atlus delivers a ridiculously compelling reason to dust off your PS2!

PS2 **ESRB: M**

■ Developer and Publisher: Atlus

As an enormous fan of the Persona franchise, I'll be the first to admit that I was a tad skeptical when I heard that Persona 4 was dropping as soon as the end of 2008. Wrapping up my fourth run-through of Persona 3: FES, I was starting to feel like there wasn't anything the series could throw at me that I hadn't seen before. But I'm happy to report Persona 4 sets itself apart from its predecessors with unprecedented levels of innovation, character, and outright charm. Persona 4 will no doubt prove to be the shot in the arm that the RPG genre needs.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Similar to Persona 3, you begin the game by filling the shoes of a mysterious transfer student from the peaceful countryside town of Inaba who comes to the big city. A series of grisly murders begins to threaten the quaint rural locale and it's up to you to solve the mystery. The deeper you pry into this bizarre series of homicides, the more complicated and surreal your once normal life becomes, leading you into a strange world of facades, parallel universes, and a mystical roller-coaster of a plot.

The narrative aspects of P4 are told expertly through superb voice acting and simply beautiful anime cutscenes that truly draw you into the game's enchanting story. Coupled with an irresistibly catchy soundtrack and top-notch character design, it's obvious that Atlus spared no expense

when building the memorable world of P4. An engaging and incredibly well-translated script weaves the game's intricate plot together, creating a cast of truly memorable characters that really complement the intriguing world that Persona 4 has created.

THOU ART I, AND I ART THOU

One of the most noticeable changes of Persona 4 is in the game's battle system, where you're now granted complete control over every member in your party. While the party A.I. is incredibly bright, the option to give specific orders to your teammates is definitely appealing and rather helpful during harder battles. The game's Social Links now affect Persona's battles as well—form unique bonds in your social life and you get access to specific special attacks, or even the ability to push each other out of harm's way at the last moment. The endless labyrinth of Persona 3's Tartarus has been replaced by a mystical TV dimension where you're able to explore an amalgam of unique worlds or "programs" created from various characters' repressed emotions, truly playing on the "persona" aspect from the franchise's earlier titles.

Also new to the series are part-time jobs, a vast collection of new extracurricular activities and an amazing assortment of shops and hot-spots around town to visit. Persona 3's moon-cycle system has been replaced by a rather intriguing weather scheme, with characters and events acting realistically to the daily changes in climate. However, my absolute

favorite addition to P4, hands down, has to be the ability to fast-travel all over Inaba at any time; it works wonders whether you're simply trying to finish up a quest given to you by a timid classmate, or run into town in order to beef up your weaponry before venturing back into the game's alternate dimension.

CATCHY THEME SONGS ASIDE...

I'll admit that I went in to Persona 4 with some strong reservations but I came out of it ready to boot up my save file and start the entire adventure over again from step one. While Persona 4 isn't revolutionary or utterly groundbreaking, it's so finely tuned and well crafted that I can't recommend it highly enough. Whether you're a series vet or a newcomer, Persona 4 is an absolute must buy if you're in the market for a compelling RPG experience. —Will Herring

FUN FACTOR

★★★★★

PROS: Amazing story; beautiful animation; really pushes the PlayStation 2 to its limits.

CONS: Takes a while for the story to get going; so engaging that your social life may suffer.



You'll get notices when your allies get into trouble; find them and help them out if you can—maybe they'll return the favor.

LEFT 4 DEAD

Zombies, guns, and gore: what more do you need?



Xbox 360

ESRB: M

Developer: Valve | Publisher: EA Games

Some things have always gone great together: peanut butter and jelly, macaroni and cheese, and of course, the ultimate combination: zombies and high doses of gratuitous violence. Valve's highly anticipated cooperative survival shooter has finally arrived, but does it live up to the flesh-munching, sinew-snapping, shotgun-pumping hype? The short answer is a highly enthusiastic "yes." The long answer would be a somewhat *more* enthusiastic, "Boomer to your left! Flank the Horde, flank the Horde! Holy Crap!"

EVIL IN YOUR RESIDENCE

Admittedly, the single-player campaign in L4D is probably its weakest aspect. You play as one of four heavily-armed Survivors who are forced to fight alongside one another in order to put an

army of corpses back in their shallow graves. Each of the four playable characters is allowed two default weapons—a pistol with limitless ammo, and a secondary firearm ranging from assault rifles to automatic shotguns. Survivors also have four basic item slots designated for flashlights, homebrew explosives, med-kits, and painkillers for quick healing. That and your skills are all that's keeping you alive against the undead siege.

The computer A.I. companions are fairly servicable and hold their own against the zombie menace; they help you out of sticky situations and hand you pain killers when your health gets low. But the true magic of L4D doesn't show itself until you get more human players into the mix. Running through the co-op mode with three of your friends is where the real action is and it makes for some truly memorable moments.

SPIRE OF (AFTER)LIFE

You can also play as the Infected in Versus mode, with a unique set of incredibly inventive and often disgusting attacks. For example, you can be a vomit-spewing Boomer whose bile attracts the mindless zombie hordes or a Smoker who attacks with an elongated tongue. There are some issues that need to be addressed—Survivors can kill you way too easily and the respawn times can be brutally long—but it's an interesting mode that adds some value.

Regardless of which mode you play, cooperation is the key to success. If even one member of

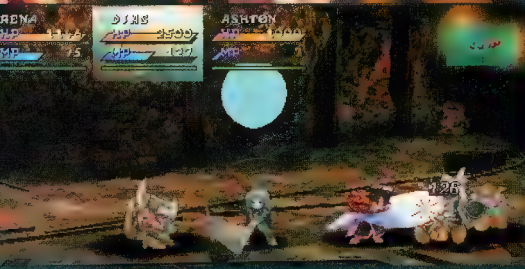
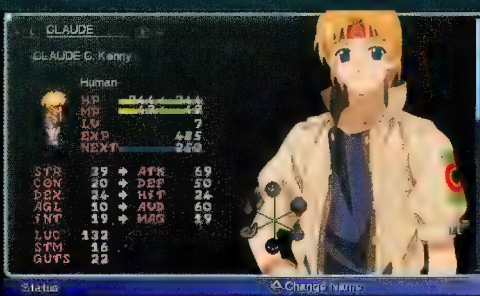
your party isn't a team player, it could cost the entire group their lives. I also liked the absolute unpredictability of each level. You can play any of the intricately designed levels from the game's massive Campaign a number of times, but with random spawn points and numbers for both enemies, items and weapons alike, you're almost guaranteed to never experience the same level twice.

LOCK AND LOAD

All in all, I can't recommend Left 4 Dead highly enough. With an intense, pulse-pounding Campaign mode, a brilliant twist on convention with the game's Versus mode and an overall mind-blowing experience from the moment you pick up your first gun, you know that Valve's delivered another amazing product that's more than worth a look.

—Will Herring





An overlooked gem, the second installment of the Star Ocean franchise receives a fantastic re-release for the PSP that's definitely worth a look.

STAR OCEAN: SECOND EVOLUTION

Don't miss your second chance to play this stellar RPG title!



PSP **ESMB:T**

Developer: Tri-Ace Publisher: Square Enix

Featuring revolutionary real-time battles as well as an immersive and original plot, Star Ocean: The Second Story garnered a warm reception from both critics and fans of the genre alike; unfortunately, it just happened to release on the original PlayStation in the same year as a little title called Final Fantasy VIII—I'm pretty sure you've heard of it. Thankfully, Second Story is getting a new lease on life with Second Evolution, a magnificent re-release on the PSP.

NEVER LOSING ITS LUSTER

Second Evolution picks up twenty years after the events of the first Star Ocean [Ed's note: this title was also recently re-released on the PSP], focusing its attention on two unlikely heroes: headstrong Claude C. Kenny, son to First Departure's Admiral Ronyx Kenny, and charismatic young Rana Lanford, denizen of the mystical world of Exel. When a routine inspection on a distant planet goes awry, clumsy Claude finds himself transported light years away from home to the wilderness of Rana's home planet, just in time to save the careless girl from an unfortunate animal attack. Using his plasma gun to rescue Rana, Claude is mistaken for the Hero of Light, a character of ancient myth dressed in foreign garb that carries a mystical "Sword of Light."

With both Claude and Rana as playable protagonists from the get-go, the story isn't as conventional as one might think. Where many games promise an adventure that requires more than one play through, Second Evolution delivers in spades with an array of twelve attainable party members, an amazing assortment of character-building Private Action scenarios, a storyline that changes with each choice your characters make and an unbelievable assortment of over eighty possible endings.

SECOND TIME'S THE CHARM

Square Enix pulled out all of the stops for this update, with astonishing animated sequences—courtesy of Production I.G., the animation house responsible for Jin-Roh and Blood: The Last Vampire—a completely revised English script featuring incredibly solid voice acting and stunning pre-rendered visuals that mesh nicely with the classic hand-drawn characters.

Second Story's battle system also received a series of fantastic user-friendly upgrades; there's a new innovative combo system as well as an assortment of new skills and specials that work astonishingly well with the PSP's handheld control scheme. Be warned, however, that the party A.I. still suffers a bit as it did in First Departure with characters casting unnecessary spells or rushing head-first into

battle unprepared. Still, even with its flaws, Second Evolution's real time battles are fun, fast-paced, and have little to no load times.

LOOKING TO THE STARS

Fans of Second Story's initial release are sure to be more than pleased with the additions made in Second Evolution, and newcomers that missed this adventure the first time around owe it to themselves to find out what all the fuss is about with this excellent re-release of an utterly engaging classic. Square Enix has done an admirable job of updating classic titles from its library and Second Evolution is just the latest example of their commitment to its loyal fanbase. —Will Herring

FUN FACTOR

PROS: Amazingly in-depth story; solid voice acting, wonderful new script.

CONS: First hour tends to drag; thick party A.I., level grinding can be annoying.

004

TIME
01:55:25SCORE
00001300SPEED
RINGS 041 RING ENERGY

The daytime levels have everything you want in a Sonic game; it's just too bad that the entire game didn't play this way.

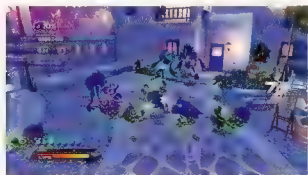
SONIC UNLEASHED

Sonic continues to prove the old adage that you just can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Xbox 360 ESRB: E10+

Developer: Sonic Team Publisher: Sega

Considering how bad Sonic's last dozen or so games have been, it's a good thing the blue blur has been finally unleashed. He goes a little wild with the freedom, but also gets the opportunity to return to his true self. Sonic Unleashed features classic speed-based platforming action that puts Sonic's previous installments to shame. Unfortunately, a set of dreadfully out-of-place action levels starring Sonic's werewolf alter ego brings everything to a screeching halt.



EVIL NEVER SLEEPS

If persistence is a virtue, then Dr. Eggman must practically be a saint. The villain is up to no good once again, snatching the Chaos Emeralds from Sonic in an attempt to summon forth a monster from the bowels of Earth. Tearing the power of the crystals away from Sonic unwittingly had the effect of give the pint-sized hero split personalities.

By day, he's the speedy, upbeat Sonic we know and love; at night, he turns aggro and becomes a hairy, muscled werewolf. Both sides of Sonic are needed, though, to piece back a fractured planet.

Sonic must reset seven continents that have been broken from the planet's core, which, of course, involves running through loops, passing over boost pads, and jumping on robotic enemies. Speedy platform levels arrive in excellent form, perfectly capturing the feel of classic Sonic. Brilliant 2D sections are broken up by quick 3D sequences that test new abilities like the side step, executed with taps of the bumper buttons. These daytime levels provide the most satisfying gameplay of any Sonic title in years.

HIT THE BRAKES

Day turns to night, however, and Sonic Unleashed becomes an entirely different game. Gone is the blue blaze, replaced by meathead action-platforming. As Sonic's aggressive alter ego, you traipse through evening stages pummeling foes and solving simple platform puzzles. None of it falls in line with the endearing qualities of the daytime levels which is to blantly say that they're no good. The controls turn equally as hairy as Sonic's skin, relinquishing the precision found in the daytime stages for a huge dose of awkwardness. Basic tasks require too many button presses; for example, jumping between columns can't be done by just jumping toward the column you wish

to latch onto. No, you have to jump then press another button to grab the column.

There's absolutely no need for these nighttime levels. Instead of providing variety, they only muck up the experience. It's like having a puppy scamper about a white carpet with muddy paws—you love the pup, but hate what a mess it makes.

TRAFFIC COURT

What an unfortunate design choice the werewolf levels were. The daytime stages were pure classic Sonic and finally gave me the speed rush I've been after for a long time. But the nighttime levels with their awkward action sequences just left me feeling flat. I love Sonic because his speedy style of platforming is fun, and Sega should have just developed a game around that and left everything else out. —Tracy Erickson

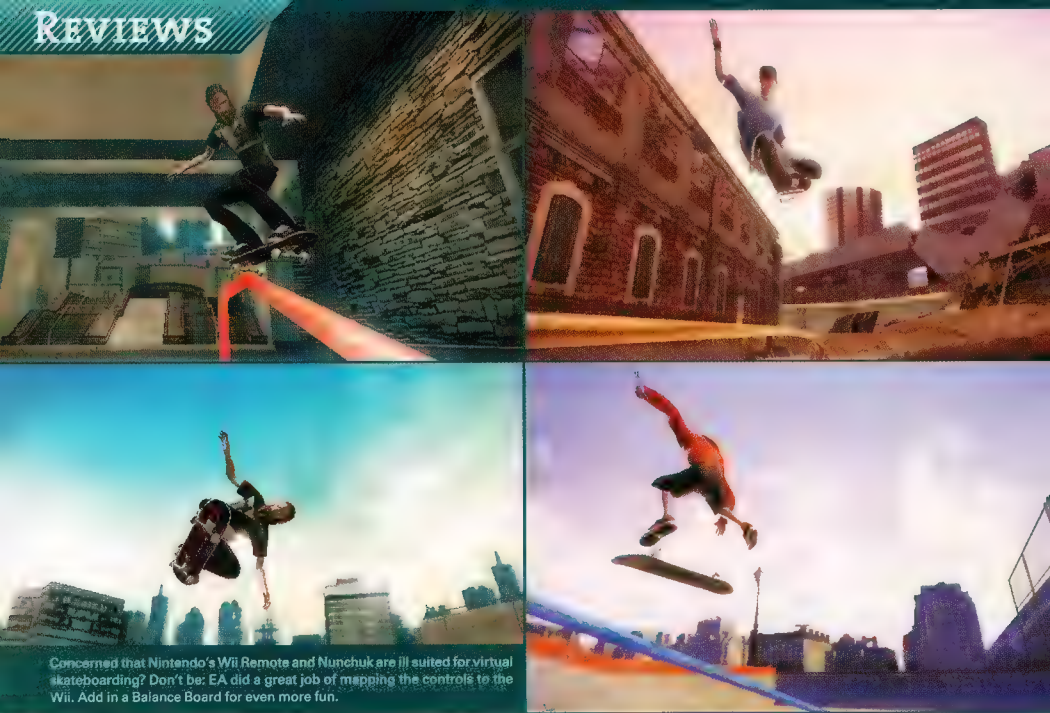
FUN FACTOR



PROS: True sense of speed; some classic Sonic level designs; good challenges, tough bosses.

CONS: Werewolf levels out of place and bland; awful voice acting.





Concerned that Nintendo's Wii Remote and Nunchuk are ill suited for virtual skateboarding? Don't be: EA did a great job of mapping the controls to the Wii. Add in a Balance Board for even more fun.

SKATE IT

EA brings their slick skate sim to the Wii, with intuitive controls, gnarly Balance Board support, and a huge bag of tricks.

Wii

Developer: EA Black Box Publisher: EA Games

Just over a year ago, Electronic Arts let Skate loose into the previously Tony Hawk-dominated extreme sports genre. The title's sim-over-arcade controls proved an instant success, earning serious street cred with fans, while giving Mr. Hawk a reason to quiver in his Vans. The Wii version, dubbed Skate It, invites gamepad grinders back to the fictional skater's paradise, San Vanelona, for another dose of slick tricks and skinned knees.

GRIP TAPE

The series' staple organic "click-it" controls, triggered by the analog sticks on the PS3 and 360 versions, survive their transmigration to the Wii-mote. Imagine the wireless Wii controller as a giant analog stick, and you'll be well on your way to urban skater stardom; kickflips, ollies, nollies, and pop shuv-its can all be intuitively pulled with some creative waggling. Additionally, A and B button presses further modify your sick skills with grabs and grinds. Toss in some air-catching tweaks and D-pad-triggered style enhancements, and you're working with a brimming bag of tricks.

Even cooler, those that have been waiting for a reason to blow that dense layer of dust off their Balance Board can hop back on for an even more

immersive experience. You'll still need the remote for some moves, but the board, which is broken into six separate pressure-sensitive points, allows your feet to further fuel the trick-infused fun. This method's actually less precise than the Wii-mote only option (as well as a third, Wii-mote and nunchuk, layout) but it does a better job of making you feel like actually you're standing atop a real deck. After cruising around and nailing a few tricks with this set-up, it's unlikely you'll return to the more intuitive but less satisfying control schemes.

BAILS AND FAILS

Visually, Skate It is typical of a Wii port: it's jaggy, blocky, and darn right ugly in some places. Still, the sub-par presentation mostly blends with the intentional layer of grit and grime that's been painted on the world. The audio fares better, with an adrenaline-pumping track list that'll have you getting back on your board no matter how many times you wipe out.

A lengthy career mode is Skate It's highlight, as it sees you building your skills through increasingly difficult challenges. Along the way you'll earn sponsorships and customize your own personal trick-enhancing hot spots by arranging environmental objects. A local multiplayer mode offers

some nice bragging right opportunities, as it lets you take on up to four friends. Despite making for a challenging, trash-talking good time, having to pass around one Wii Remote or wait for the board to calibrate for each player is a bit of a drag.

THE DAILY GRIND

Flaws aside, Skate It successfully brings its genre-defining formula to the Wii crowd, while also giving your Balance Board a break from yoga and step aerobics. Hot on the heels of Shaun White's recent board-balancing entry, Skate It gives gamers another good reason to get off the couch this season.

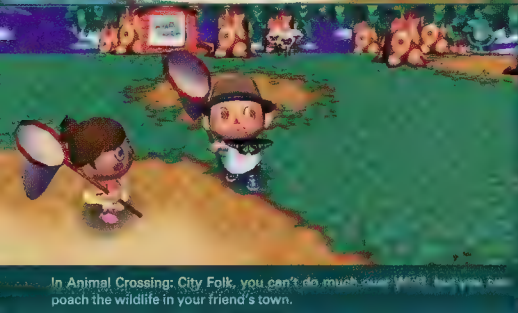
—Matt Cabral

FUN FACTOR

★★★★★

PROS: Nifty controls; a huge bag of tricks; makes good use of the Balance Board.

CONS: The graphics aren't so pretty; local multiplayer mode requires too much setup.



ANIMAL CROSSING: CITY FOLK

The charming and cute life sim comes to the Wii, but it's just more of the same old, same old.



Developer and Publisher: Nintendo

I played a lot of Animal Crossing on the GameCube but rather than interacting with my furry neighbors and exploring the game world, I actually ended up spending most of my time holed up in the basement of my digital den playing old school NES games. I also took Wild World on the DS for a few spins but couldn't quite get into the vibe of the uber-casual portable game. I thought the new Wii installment, City Folk, might finally convince me to dig deep into an Animal Crossing world but it didn't. Its laid-back style works well on the Wii but the lack of innovation and "newness" kept it from truly feeling like home.

HUMAN ABOUT TOWN

Gamers familiar with the first two Animal Crossing games will immediately feel at home in this iteration. The gameplay retains the classic AC formula: You roll a character, purchase a home, meet your animal neighbors, and start working off your debt. You can run errands, sell fish, insects, and even dinosaur bones to town proprietor Tom Nook, or sell radishes in a stock-market microcosm. My initial time in my town wasn't exactly full of surprises, but it was enjoyable and there's plenty to do.

However, while I certainly had fun getting re-acquainted with the quaint animal-filled town, I knew the true test of City Folk's mettle was what lay outside the town limits. I expected big things but instead was left disappointed by how small this part of the game ended up being. We're

talking about an area 1/20th the size of your town, with six or seven buildings to enter, and four or five animals to chat with. What the city lacked in size, however, it made up for with charm. The few businesses in the city were fun to peruse and definitely encouraged repeat business.

YOU BELONG TO THE CITY

The Happy Room Academy that consistently mocked my decorating skills with snide letters on the GameCube had an actual presence, with a sample room in the back that displayed what the company was looking for. A salon allowed me to drastically change my look so that I resembled my Mii, and The Marquee featured a comedian that's so bad he's actually pretty good. Rounding out the robust establishments is the fact that you're always encountering new animals about the city. For fans of the first two that bemoaned the fact that their town's population was full of duds, visiting the city this time around will alleviate some of the pain.

The Wii's Wi-Fi capabilities add another facet of animal interaction to the series with the ability to visit a friend in their town, which is nice even if you still have to deal with friend codes. It's a great way to find new items, fish and fruit, but unfortunately, there's not a lot you can do to entertain visiting guests. There's no minigames to take part in, nor can you interact in any meaningful way outside of chatting over the Wii Speak peripheral, which is sort of cool. Worst of all, you can't hit up

the city, which would probably be a blast with a friend. Thankfully, the Wii Speak peripheral works really well and I hope Nintendo finds a way to integrate it into more of its games.

I BUILT THIS CITY

City Folk never really hooked me and made me want to invest a ton of time into it. I enjoyed kicking back and fishing or shopping for a cool new couch, but the repetitive nature of gameplay has begun to wear on me. New arrivals and die-hard fans will probably enjoy the multitude of activities on display but gamers looking for something fresh and unique probably won't find much to keep them satisfied. —Dave Rudden



FUN FACTOR

★★★★☆

PROS: Has the same laid-back feel of the first two AC games, with some decent additions.

CONS: It's not that different from the first two nor is it enjoyable for long stretches.



Activate the Rage mode to make your attacks unblockable. Toasty!

MORTAL KOMBAT vs. DC UNIVERSE

Check your brain at the door and you'll enjoy this campy, ludicrously over-the-top fighter.

PS3 Xbox 360 ESRB: T

■ Developer and Publisher: Midway

There are several ways to judge a game like *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*. One way is to compare it to top-tier, tournament-grade fighting games such as *Soulcalibur IV*, *Tekken 5*, and *Virtua Fighter 5*. The problem is *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* is miles away from a technical fighter—it's not even remotely trying to compete with those games. To judge *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* on its technical merits is to miss the point entirely, as this is a fighting game designed to be played by a broader, more casual audience. Taken in this context, *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* is largely a success.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

When a battle between Superman and the villainous Darkseid triggers a "resonance cascade" scenario, several dimensions begin to collide with predictable brand-crossover results. Now warriors from the *Mortal Kombat* universe are prowling the streets of Gotham City and Metropolis looking for trouble. Making matters worse is the DC and MK heroes are being possessed by "Rage," a mysterious affliction tied to the merging of the two worlds, which makes them uncontrollably attack friend and foe alike.

The Story Mode is a minor innovation in that it enables you to play from the perspective of either the *Mortal Kombat* or DC characters as they attempt to set their universes straight. And while the plot and dialogue are ludicrous in both storylines, the

two distinct perspectives do provide genuine incentive to replay the single-player game. Voice acting in the cinematics is hit-and-miss, with characters such as The Joker and Batman sounding dead-on, and others, like Shang Tsung, sounding just, well, *dead*. Depending on your sense of humor, these moments are hilariously endearing or painfully embarrassing.

KORE KOMBAT

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe is firmly rooted in the gameplay tradition of *Mortal Kombat*. The fights are a blend of both the old and the new from the MK series, combining the simpler 2D pleasures of the early games (jumpkicks and fireballs galore) with the deeper combos and strategies of the later 3D titles such as *Deception* and *Armageddon*. The resulting gameplay feels fast, fluid, and fun—it's definitely a step in the right direction. It's not the deepest combat system ever, but the barrier to entry is low and you can pick up a character's basic techniques in under a minute.

A few splashy new gameplay wrinkles are also introduced, including "Klone Kombat," where the camera zooms in while characters pummel each other at close range with headbutts, elbows, and knees; "Test Your Might" returns as a mid-match button-tapping frenzy; and "Freefall Kombat" enables you to bash your opponent off a cliff and whack away at him in mid-air. This last twist feels fresh and exciting, and is a natural step forward for this storied series. I hope to see it return for the next MK game.

THE DEATH OF DEATH?

MK vs. DC also pushes its Teen rating to its breaking point, with broken necks, blood spurts, and full-body incineration all present and accounted for. Though many of the new finishing moves are disappointingly tame, there are a few gems to be found. There's no escaping the fact that some longtime fans may be disappointed by the game's new Teen rating and the introduction of DC Comics fighters. But while MK vs. DC isn't the best *Mortal Kombat* game, it makes the franchise feel relevant again. It's silly, it's frivolous, and at times it's downright unbalanced, but it's also unapologetically *Mortal Kombat*. As long as you keep your expectations firmly in check, *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* is good, goofy fun. —Sid Shuman

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Freefall and Klone Kombat bring variety; low learning curve; online mode has little lag.

CONS: Uneven visuals; some gameplay imbalances; gore is somewhat toned down.



The action is solid, but the game's presentation leaves a lot to be desired.



RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

A legendary fable inspires a not so legendary game

Xbox 360

Developer: Liquid Entertainment Publisher: Codemasters

Rise of the Argonauts wanted so very badly to be a thrilling action adventure and sought to draw gamers in with a combination of entertaining gameplay and stunning visuals. However, this adventure falls flat with a disappointing mix of substandard graphics and mediocre design. An inventive skill system rises to the occasion, but it's not nearly enough to save the game from epic shortcomings.

MASSIVE DAMAGE

The story, which was long ago told by Greek bards and here rewritten, crowns you as the fabled King Jason of Iolcus. Following the unexpected murder of your wife Alceme, you vow to find the Golden Fleece in a desperate effort to bring her back to life. As the Oracle at Delphi explains, recovering the elusive relic requires an arduous journey to track down the bloodline of the gods themselves.

Getting blood isn't a problem for Jason whose combat prowess pits him against man and beast across all of Greece. Rise of the Argonauts focuses on combat above all else: you're granted three hot-swap weapons—lance, mace, and sword—which you can switch between with a tap of the bumper buttons. For all weapons, pressing the X button initiates a basic attack and Y a more powerful one; moreover, holding down the right trigger allows you to augment your blows for greater damage. It's a simple, yet satisfying system that performs well enough. Swapping weapons isn't nearly as smooth and seamless as promised, but Jason moves with great agility and you're given plenty of flexibility in varying attacks.

SKILLS

Basic role-playing elements ensure you're rewarded for exacting massive damage on enemies thanks to an inventive skill tree that's tied to your combat performance. A star map outlines deeds that Jason can perform to curry favor with the gods Aries, Athena, Hermes, and Apollo. These range from killing a certain number of enemies to completing specific tasks. You're constantly acquiring news deeds, which you then commit to one of the four gods to receive an aspect point; you then use these points to unlock more skills, so the more deeds you finish and aspect points you earn, the more powerful and diverse your skill set will be.

This concept successfully elaborates on a fundamental cornerstone of role-playing games: character development. Since each god entertains a distinct set of skills related to their divine attributes—for example, Aries, the god of war, grants skills focusing on aggression and combat—you're given a wide variety of skills with which to tailor your character. It's a rather phenomenal breed of strategic character development.

TALK TO THE HAND

Other role-playing conventions find their way into the game, although with less aplomb. Traveling in search of the Golden Fleece means conversing with locals of the various domains you visit. The gods play a role in the rudimentary dialogue trees as well: Aries responses are naturally hot-headed while Hermes responses are witty. Sadly, your choices don't hold much consequence. Conversations are

boring to begin with thanks to dull writing and knowing your choices rarely matter only encourages you to flit through as quickly as possible.

The level designs also leave much to be desired thanks to an unnecessary amount of backtracking. Unimaginative, often silly objectives force you to waltz back and forth to instigate lame conversations or activate switches. Perhaps if the visuals were more pleasing it wouldn't feel like such a chore but the graphics are underwhelming to say the least. Most of the characters and environments are lifeless and ugly, which is shocking considering the game's built on the Unreal Engine 3.0—the original God of War looks better in spots.

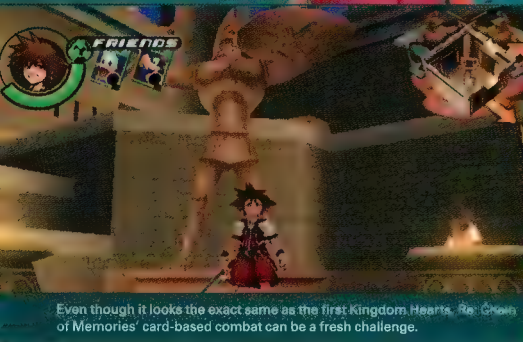
It's a real shame that the developers didn't surround the solid action and innovative skill progression concept with better presentation and design fundamentals. If they had, perhaps the game could have lived up to the epic majesty of the myth that inspired its creation. —Tracy Erickson

FLIN FACTOR



PROS: Inventive skill system; varied combat system; solid action.

CONS: Substandard graphics; bland level design; meaningless dialogue choices.



Even though it looks the exact same as the first Kingdom Hearts, *Re: Chain of Memories*' card-based combat can be a fresh challenge.



KINGDOM HEARTS RE: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

A solid way to pass the time until the next Kingdom Hearts title releases.

PS2

Developer and Publisher: Square Enix

When Square Enix re-releases RPG games, they often tread a fine line between creating thoughtful remakes or hatred-inspiring rehashes. I'm happy to report that Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories, a PS2 port of a GBA game, falls in the former category—it's a worthy addition to the much beloved franchise as well as a compelling choice for die-hard fans as it sheds some much needed light on events from past entries in the Kingdom Hearts franchise. Series newcomers, however, might find themselves a little lost in the intricate plot that Kingdom Hearts has spawned thus far.

(NOT) A WHOLE NEW WORLD

At first glance, Chain of Memories looks a lot like the first Kingdom Hearts, but don't let its aesthetic overhaul fool you. One of the biggest differences between the two is the way the Disney-themed levels are mapped for Sora and company to explore. This time around, each stage is made up of a series of rooms connected through an overworld grid known as Castle Oblivion. The game's battles are still played out in real time as in past KH games but are treated with a card deck scheme, allowing you to choose separate cards for certain attacks and tactics, constantly switching out your cards in order to build the most effective deck for each encounter. Backtracking through the Castle is also a cinch: defeated

enemies don't respawn after their defeat, allowing you to take the time to level grind and explore secret rooms you may have missed the first time around.

Still, it's obvious that Chain of Memories didn't get as much polish as it could have. New cutscenes, while nice to look at, are sparse and mostly absent of voice acting, and the graphics aren't anywhere near the special effects madness that was present in Kingdom Hearts II. However, my biggest gripe with Chain of Memories was the frustrating lack of a coherent battle camera. Even though it can be manually adjusted with the analog stick, trying to do so while playing attention to hordes of Heartless and your card deck is a downright hassle. If Square Enix more or less fixed the rampant camera issues in Kingdom Hearts II, why couldn't they have spent some time programming those corrections into this release?

KING OF HEARTS, ACE OF KEYBLADES

Even so, the schizophrenic camera may be the least of your worries in Chain of Memories. Even on the easiest difficulty, this game offers a good challenge. At the other end of the scale, it's one the hardest action RPGs you'll ever play. Enemies will often appear in groups, and dodging in real time while choosing the right counter cards takes a fair bit of concentration. Personally, I feel like it's a *huge* step up from the lazy "hit the X button, rinse, repeat" combat of the

original Kingdom Hearts. Building decks gets very addictive early on in the game, and with so many cards to collect there was a part of me that wanted to repeat certain areas just for the loot.

Even though it's not a wholly fresh experience, Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories is definitely worth a try, especially if you didn't play the original GBA release. There's hours of gameplay in this title (even after beating it once) and the challenge alone should keep things interesting for both hardcore and casual gamers alike. With the series third installment still a ways off and 2006's sequel a fleeting memory, Chain of Memories may be just what ailing Kingdom Heart addicts need to tide them over until the next release.

—McKinley Noble

FUN FACTOR

★★★★☆

PROS: Challenging combat; addictive card system, overall tight pacing.

CONS: Frustrating camera; graphics are almost identical to the first Kingdom Hearts game.



These lumbering goliaths may pack a wallop, but they're slow enough for Rygar to easily gain the upper hand.



RYGAR: THE BATTLE OF ARGUS

An unpolished port that's about six years past its "Best by" date.

Wii **ESRB T**

Developer and Publisher Tecmo

Rygard: The Battle of Argus is a port of the 2002 PlayStation 2 title, Rygar: The Legendary Adventure, only with an "intensified" new protagonist, less responsive controls, downgraded graphics, and stripped of all CG cutscenes that gave Rygar any inkling of a story. Now, call me crazy, but it's been six years after the title's initial release on a "last-gen" system, and Tecmo's treating a downgraded port as a step forward in the once prestigious franchise? Oddly enough, something about this experiment just doesn't add up.

SEE RYGAR SMASH

As is the unfortunately case with some Wii ports, Battle of Argus plays like a watered down version of the game that inspired it. It doesn't bring anything new to the table, and in fact manages to take a few steps backward. Its bland textures and blocky, jagged polygons look like they belong on the Nintendo 64, while a frustrating auto-camera awkwardly plants itself in irritating new positions each time you turn a corner, making Rygar's obsession with infuriating platforming puzzles all the more maddening.

Speaking of puzzles, there are about four of them in the entire game, and here's a Pro-Tip on how to solve all of them: slide beneath it, light it on

fire, pick up a large vase or, as in most cases, simply smash the beejesus out of it. Tedious and linear affairs, Rygar's puzzles require about as much brain power as a one-sided Rubik's Cube.

SMASH, RYGAR, SMASH

Battle of Argus does have a few new extras not featured in the original *Legendary Adventure*, but it's tough to call any of them worthwhile additions. What's bound to grab your attention first and foremost is Rygar's character design, which has been completely overhauled from the somber hero of 8-bit legend to an obnoxious, shirtless, spiky haired cliché straight out of *Dragon Ball Z* fan fiction. Again, this proves more as an oddity than anything, as not a single other character model, texture or pixel has been touched upon save our protagonist's "Intense" new look.

Argus' other exclusive comes in the form of "Gladiator Mode", a brand new boss battle feature that breaks the game down to its bare essentials: fight waves of enemies, move to the next level and fight a boss. Puzzlingly enough, the Wii's motion controls come into play only in *Gladiator Mode*, leaving you aimlessly flailing your arms in hopes of cutting down the next wave of enemies with one of Rygar's three motion-controlled attacks. While

it is a nice form of mindless stress release, I realized as I played it that I was really only getting rid of the stress I'd built up during my time with the terrible main campaign mode. Oh the irony.

THE LEGEND IS DEAD

I can't in good faith recommend Rygar: The Battle of Argus—both fans of the original and newcomers should avoid it. If you really need to satiate your inner warrior, pick up a used copy of *Heavenly Sword*, *God of War* or even the original Rygar—you're guaranteed a better adventure than anything *Battle of Argus* can throw at you.

—Will Herring

FUN FACTOR

★★★★☆

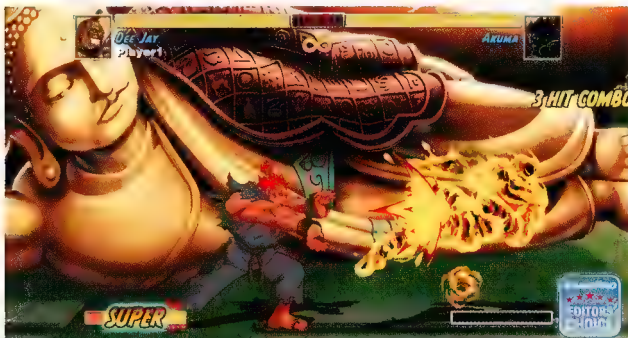
PROS: Argus' auto camera makes it easy to fight from playing the actual game.

CONS: Dated visuals; awkward controls; game simply isn't any fun.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX

PSN XBLA

Developer and Publisher: Capcom



Although the HD visuals are a huge hook of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*, purists have the option to play in 4:3 mode, enable classic background music, and even run the original 2D sprites.

Everything, from the graphics to the tweaks in each character's moveset, makes *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* feel like a completely new game rather than an update. Capcom's efforts really stand out in this remake, and after all these years, it's worth both the wait and the price.

REMIXED, REDRAWN, RE-EVERYTHING

With *Turbo HD Remix*, everything feels like it has finally fallen into place. While there's still a few balance issues that need to be hammered out—a few characters have been over-buffed yet again—*HD Remix* serves up plenty of awesome action that should please any gamer with a fighting pulse. Oh, and the game looks downright gorgeous.

More than anything, *HD Remix* absolutely shines in the graphics department. The level of polish on the hand-drawn stages and characters is breathtaking, and there's plenty of fine detail in every nook and cranny of the game. Sure, it's one thing to redraw Chun Li and gussy up her respective stage, but doing it while retaining that classic feel from 15 years ago is something else altogether. Of course, there's subtle hints of 3D elements in the special effects of moves like the Hadouken and Sonic Boom, which only makes pulling off a 10-hit combo super move that much sweeter.

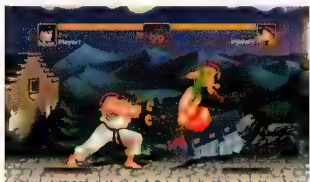
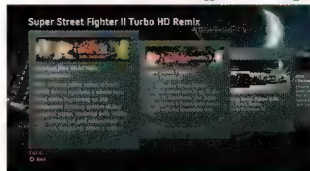
THE BEST ONE YET

A lot of changes have been made to the combat, and it's obvious in each fighter's moveset. Some techniques have been toned down (or up), others have been given new animations and timing, and there are a handful of brand-new moves to learn

that can really change up your matches. For series vets, the rebalancing of the characters can feel more than a little awkward. For newbies, the timing required to dodge fireballs, counter throws, and trade hits with your opponent is much more forgiving than before, and with some hardcore practice, you'll be fighting with the best in mere days.

There's also a back to basics Classic mode for old school fighters, the training mode and nitbox display options will be immensely helpful to fighters with rusty skills, and extensive online rankings coupled with the new World Tournament mode will have gamers constantly striving to reach the top of the mountain. I can't think of a better way to spend your online dollars—*Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* is the best version of SFFII yet, if not the best Street Fighter game in 15 years.

—McKinley Noble



FUN FACTOR



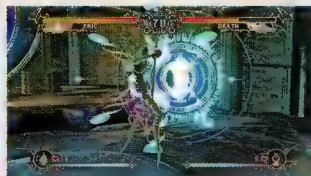
PROS: Extraordinary graphics, classic and revamped music, great combat action.

CONS: Some rebalanced characters in *Remix* Arcade mode are still a touch too powerful.

CASTLEVANIA JUDGMENT

Wii

Developer and Publisher: Konami



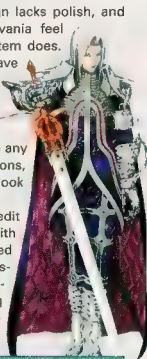
Castlevania Judgment had a lot of potential. There's a decently sized roster of characters, including favorites like Simon Belmont and the half-vampire Alucard, and each fighter has a distinct set of moves that are topped off with two stock super moves that can drain up to half an opponent's life. The various battlefields are home to famous sub-weapons like axes and holy crosses which you can pick up from random spawn points. It should have all added up to a great fighting experience but it's all ruined by shoddy gameplay and character design.

Trying to hit your opponent in *Castlevania Judgment* is like pulling teeth thanks to a terrible targeting system and an equally bad camera. Even worse, while you'll have trouble trying to connect on basic attacks, the enemy A.I. will have no problem pummeling you. The frustrating combat system doesn't improve, even after hours and hours in the story mode, which requires you to play 12 times through in order to unlock all the characters and beat the final boss.

Even the character design lacks polish, and it detracts from the *Castlevania* feel as much as the fighting system does.

Past games in the series have had great character designs but *Judgment* is a definitive step down in terms of quality. For instance, Maria and Shanoa look nothing like any of their previous incarnations, ultimately making the roster look generic and ill-planned.

I want to give Konami credit for trying something new with the series but this is just a failed attempt at re-imagining a classic franchise. I highly recommend renting it before adding it to your permanent Wii collection. —McKinley Noble



FUN FACTOR



PROS: Decent number of characters; sub-weapons add depth to the gameplay.

CONS: Horrible camera; terrible targeting; poor character design; repetitive story mode.

POKÉMON RANGER: SHADOW OF ALMIA

DS

Developer HAL Labs Publisher Nintendo



Even if you're a hardcore Pokémon freak, minor gameplay changes and a yawn-inducing story means this kiddy DS title just isn't worth the price for more seasoned gamers.

PIKACHU, I CIRCLE YOU!

In the first Pokémon Ranger, a new concept of Pokémon-catching was introduced that didn't include Pokéballs, gyms, or battling. It was heresy, but the resulting game was a memorable spinoff of the main franchise. Shadows of Almia, the recently released sequel to Pokémon Ranger has a lot of things that I wish the previous Pokémon titles had: exceptionally animated graphics, intricately detailed sprites, and more active ways to "catch" Pokémon. Unfortunately, Shadows of Almia's actual gameplay gets old before the game even gets started.

With Shadows of Almia, you're put in the role of a rookie "Pokémon Ranger," a special type of trainer who enlists the help of wild Pokémon to do community service. This includes anything from visiting old ladies in retirement homes (boring) to fighting forest fires (less boring). Catching Pokémon in this game is done via the special Styler, a device that tames Pokémon with a beam of "friendship" and good will. Making a successful capture is easy, since all you have to do is trace circles around the Pokémon. The capture process is easy—so easy, that by the time you've played through a few hours of the game, it presents no real challenge.

POKÉMON MASTER-SLASH-NANNY

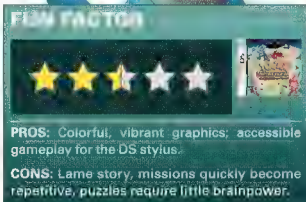
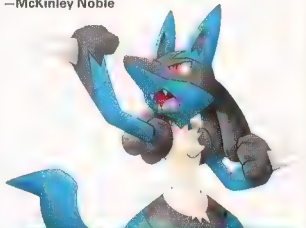
There's a painful amount of missions you'll have to complete to get through the game, and most of them involve either "fetch quests" or a variation of "bring-this-Pokémon-to-this-obstacle-to-get-to-the-next-area" tasks. Even as you gain the ability to retain a small army of Pokémon with your Styler, the tedious nature of tracing loops and



backtracking through areas for specific Pokémon types will surely test your attention.

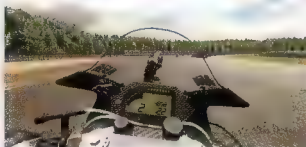
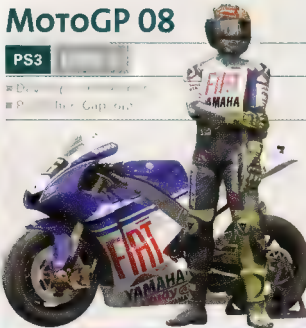
To the game's credit, Shadows of Almia looks much better than it plays. From underwater levels to fire-filled volcanoes, there's always a bit of excitement in seeing what new Pokémon populate every region. Still, the charm wears off before the game ever picks up, hampered by a cookie cutter story that fails to really engage its players. Even when you're circling and taming legendary Pokémon, the gameplay remains inherently the same as it was the first hour. If you're going to pick up Shadows of Almia, just keep in mind that while it can be fun, there's nothing compelling or new enough to impress a hardcore Pokémonianic.

—McKinley Noble



MotoGP 08

PS3



The official game for the Grand Prix motorcycle road race, MotoGP 08 is a realistic racer with just enough challenging gameplay and intense racing to keep real-life racing fans coming back for more.

All of the usual racing modes are available, from Time Trial to Career. Career is for people who embrace the long haul, but be warned: a career can only last five seasons. You start at the bottom and work your way up through 125cc, 250cc and eventually, MotoGP. Upgrades are available, but only in the form of earning points and cashing those points in for things like better acceleration and braking. There isn't much in the way of customization, so people who like to tweak vehicle and rider alike might be underwhelmed by the game's lack of customization.

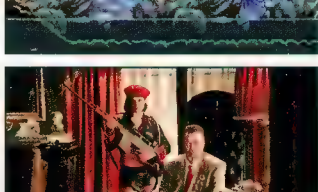
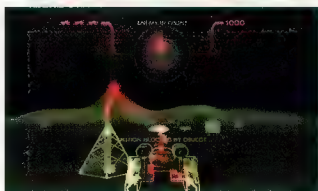
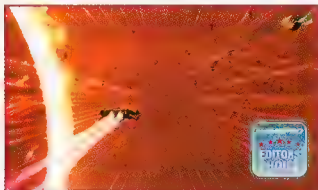
Fans of real life Grand Prix racing and previous series installments should be more than happy with MotoGP 08. Still, with a steep learning curve met with a slightly wonky control scheme, dedicated motorheads might find themselves disappointed by the game's lack of choice when it comes to upgrades, but what MotoGP lacks in customization it more than makes up for with intense, pulse-pounding racing.

—Andrew Gori

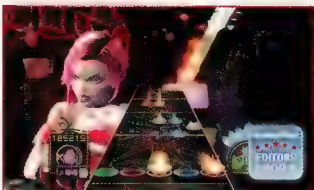
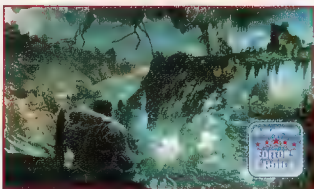


Games of 2008: *GamePro* reviews all the hottest new games as well as top current hits. For full reviews, trailers, screen shots, and the best prices, please visit **GamePro.com**. Games in **red** are Editors' Choice, and have received a score of **★★★★★** or **higher**. Here's a wrap-up of the games of 2008.

NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
Aces of the Galaxy	XBLA	Sierra	★★★★★	E	GP.com ▶
Advance Wars: Days of Ruin	DS	Nintendo	★★★★★	E10+	4/08
Age of Conan: The Hyborian Adventures	PC	Funcom	★★★★☆	M	GP.com
Air Traffic Chaos	DS	Majesco	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Alone in the Dark	Xbox 360	Atari	★★★☆☆	M	9/08
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	DS	Capcom	★★★★☆	T	4/08
Army of Two	Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★★☆	M	5/08
Animal Crossing: City Folk	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★☆	E	2/09
Arkanoid	DS	Square Enix	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	PC	Ubisoft	★★★★☆	M	GP.com ▶
Away: Shuffle Dungeon	DS	Majesco	★★★★☆	E10+	GP.com
Baja: Edge of Control	Xbox 360	THQ	★★★☆☆	E	GP.com
Bangai-O Spirits	DS	D3	★★★★☆	E10+	9/08
Bionic Commando Rearmed	PSN, XBLA	Capcom	★★★★☆	E	10/08
BioShock	PS3	2K Games	★★★★★	M	11/08
Battle of the Bands	Wii	THQ	★★★★☆	T	6/08
Battlezone	XBLA	Atari	★★★★☆	E	GP.com ▶
Bleach: Dark Souls	DS	Sega	★★★★☆	T	GP.com
Blitz: The League II	PS3	Midway	★★★★☆	M	12/08
Boom Blox	Wii	EA Games	★★★★☆	E	8/08
Bomberman Land	PSP	Hudson Soft	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Brain Assist	DS	Sega	★★★☆☆	E	GP.com
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	★★★★☆	M	GP.com
Bully: Scholarship Edition	Xbox 360	Rockstar	★★★★☆	T	5/08
Burnout Paradise	PS3	EA Games	★★★★★	E10+	2/08
Call of Duty: World at War	Xbox 360	Activision	★★★★★	M	1/09
Castlevania Judgment	Wii	Konami	★★★★☆	T	2/09
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	DS	Konami	★★★★☆	T	11/08 ▶
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	DS	Disney Int.	★★★★☆	E10+	GP.com
Chrono Trigger	DS	Square Enix	★★★★★	E10+	12/08
The Club	Xbox 360	Sega	★★★★★	M	4/08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	PC	EA Games	★★★★★	T	6/08
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★★☆	T	GP.com ▶
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	PS3	Sega	★★★★★	M	GP.com
Conflict: Denied Ops	Xbox 360	Eidos	★★★☆☆	M	5/08
Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	PSP	Square Enix	★★★★★	T	4/08
Crysis Warhead	PC	EA Games	★★★★★	M	GP.com
Culdcept Saga	Xbox 360	Namco Ban.	★★★★☆	T	5/08
Dead Space	PS3, Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★★★	M	12/08
Dark Sector	Xbox 360	D3 Publisher	★★★★☆	M	6/08 ▶
de Blob	Wii	THQ	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Deca Sports	Wii	Hudson Soft	★★★★☆	E	6/08
Defendin DePenguin	DS	Crave	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed	Wii	THQ	★★★☆☆	T	GP.com
Devil May Cry 4	PS3, Xbox 360	Capcom	★★★★★	M	3/08

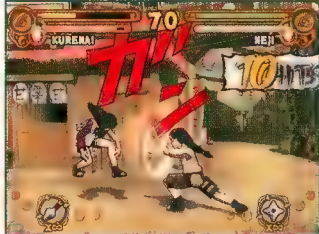
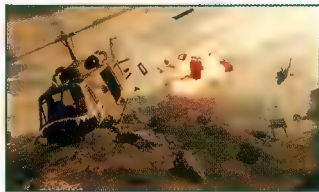


NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice	PS3	NIS America	★★★★	T	GP.com ▶
Disgaea DS	DS	NIS America	★★★★	T	10/08
Downstream Panic	PSP	Atari	★★★★	E10+	4/08
Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit	PS3, Xbox 360	Atari	★★★★	T	8/08
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob SquarePants Edition	DS	THQ	★★★★	E	GP.com
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	DS	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	10/08
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	Wii	Square Enix	★★★★	T	3/08 ▶
Dungeon Explorer: Warriors of Ancient Arts	PSP	Hudson Soft	★★★☆☆	T	GP.com
Eco Creatures: Save the Forest	DS	Majesco	★★★☆☆	E	GP.com
Endless Ocean	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	E	2/08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	PC	Activision	★★★★	T	GP.com
Fable II	Xbox 360	Microsoft	★★★★	M	1/08
FaceBreaker	PS3	EA Sports	★★★★	T	10/08
Fallout 3	Xbox 360	Bethesda	★★★★	M	12/08 ▶
Far Cry 2	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	★★★★	M	GP.com
FIFA Street 3	Xbox 360	EA Sports Big	★★★★	E	4/08
Final Fantasy IV	DS	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	8/08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	DS	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	5/08
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	Wii	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	7/08
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	DS	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	8/08
Fracture	Xbox 360	LucasArts	★★★★	T	11/08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	Xbox 360	THQ	★★★★	T	5/08
Gears of War 2	Xbox 360	Microsoft	★★★★	M	12/08 ▶
God of War: Chains of Olympus	PSP	Sony	★★★★	M	5/08
Golden Axe: Beast Rider	PS3, Xbox 360	Sega	★★★☆☆	M	12/08
Grand Theft Auto IV	Xbox 360	Rockstar	★★★★	M	6/08
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	PS3	Sony	★★★★	E	GP.com
GRID	Xbox 360	Codemasters	★★★★	E	8/08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	Xbox 360	Activision	★★★★	T	GP.com
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	Xbox 360	Activision	★★★★	T	GP.com ▶
Guitar Hero: On Tour	DS	Activision	★★★★	E10+	9/08
Guitar Hero: On Tour Decades	DS	Activision	★★★★	E10+	1/09
Guitar Hero World Tour	Xbox 360	Activision	★★★★	T	1/09
Hail to the Chimp	Xbox 360	GameCock	★★★★	T	GP.com
Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law	PSP	Capcom	★★★★	T	4/08
Haze	PS3	Ubisoft	★★★★	M	8/08
Helboy: The Science of Evil	PS3, Xbox 360	Konami	★★★★	T	7/08
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	PSP	Sony	★★★★	E	GP.com
Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds	PS3	Sony	★★★★	E	GP.com ▶
Imperium Romanum	PC	SouthPeak	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Infinite Undiscovery	Xbox 360	Square Enix	★★★★	T	11/08



CONTINUED ▶

NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
Insecticide	DS	GameCock	★★★	E10+	GP.com
Iron Man	Xbox 360	Sega	★★	T	6/08
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	DS	Atlus	★★★★	T	7/08
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	DS	Aksys	★	T	7/08
Kage Densetsu: The Legend of Kage 2	DS	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories	PS2	Square Enix	★★★★	E10+	2/09
Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom	Xbox 360	Microsoft	★★	M	3/08
The Last Remnant	Xbox 360	Square Enix	★★★★	M	1/09
Left 4 Dead	Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★★	M	2/09
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	Xbox 360	WBIE	★★★★	E10+	12/08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	Xbox 360	LucasArts	★★★★	E10+	7/08
Line Rider 2: Unbound	DS	Genius	★★★★	E	GP.com
LittleBigPlanet	PS3	Sony	★★★★	E	12/08
LOL	DS	Agetec	★★★★	E	GP.com
Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked	Wii	Konami	★★	E10+	GP.com
Lost Odyssey	Xbox 360	Microsoft	★★★	T	5/08
Lost: Via Domus	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	★★★	T	GP.com
Madden NFL 2009	Xbox 360	EA Sports	★★★★	E	10/08
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	DS	Sega	★★★	E	4/08
Mario Kart Wii	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	E	6/08
Mario Super Sluggers	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	E	10/08
Mass Effect	PC	EA Games	★★★★	M	8/08
Master of the Monster Lair	DS	Atlus	★★★	E10+	GP.com
Mega Man Star Force 2	DS	Capcom	★★★	E10+	7/08
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★★	T	11/08
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	PS3	Konami	★★★★	M	7/08
Mercury Meltdown Revolution	Wii	Ignition Ent	★★★★	E	GP.com
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	PS3, Xbox 360	Rockstar	★★★★	T	GP.com
Mirror's Edge	PS3, Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★★	T	1/09
Mister Slime	DS	SouthPeak	★★★★	E	GP.com
Monster Lab	DS	Eidos	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	PS3, Xbox 360	Midway	★★★★	T	2/09
MotoGP 08	PS3	Capcom	★★★★	E	2/09
MotorStorm Pacific Rift	PS3	Sony	★★★★	T	GP.com
Mount & Blade	PC	Paradox	★★★★	T	GP.com
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	DS	GameCock	★★★	E	GP.com
MX vs. ATV Untamed	PSP	THQ	★★	E	GP.com
Mysterious Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer	DS	Sega	★★★★	E	GP.com
N+	DS, PSP	Atari	★★★★	E	GP.com
Nanostray 2	DS	Majesco	★★★★	E	10/08
Naruto: Ninja Destiny	DS	D3 Publisher	★★★	T	GP.com
Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2	DS	D3 Publisher	★★★	T	11/08
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3	PS2	D3 Publisher	★★★★	T	GP.com
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	PS3	Midway	★★★	E	GP.com

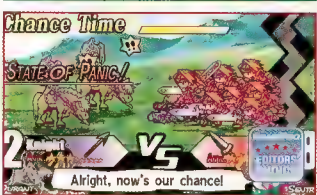
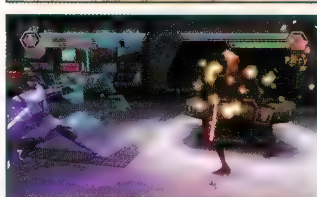


NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
Need For Speed Undercover	Xbox 360	EA Games	★★★	T	GP.com ▶
New International Track & Field	DS	Konami	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
NHL 09	Xbox 360	EA Sports	★★★★★	E	GP.com
Ninja Gaiden II	Xbox 360	Tecmo	★★★★	M	8/08
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	DS	Tecmo	★★★★☆	T	4/08
Ninja Reflex	Wii	EA Games	★★★★☆	E10+	GP.com
No More Heroes	Wii	Ubisoft	★★★★★	M	3/08
Okami	Wii	Capcom	★★★★★	T	5/08
Opoona	Wii	Koei	★★★	E10+	5/08
Order Up!	Wii	Zoo Games	★★★★	E	GP.com
Patapon	PSP	Sony	★★★★★	E	4/08
Pictolmage	DS	Sega	★★★☆☆	E	GP.com ▶
PixelJunk Eden	PSN	Sony	★★★★☆	E	10/08
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	DS	Nintendo	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Pokémon Ranger: Shadow of Almia	DS	Nintendo	★★★☆☆	E	2/09
The Political Machine 2008	PC	Stardock	★★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Prince of Persia	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	★★★★★	T	1/09
Professor Layton and the Curious Village	DS	Nintendo	★★★★	E	GP.com
Puchi Puchi Virus	DS	NIS	★★★☆☆	E	GP.com
Pure	Xbox 360	Disney Int.	★★★★★	E	GP.com ▶
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	PSP	Sony	★★★★	T	3/08
Puzzle Guzzle	PSP	Agetec	★★★★	E	GP.com
Quantum of Solace	PS3	EA Games	★★★★☆	T	GP.com
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	Wii	Ubisoft	★★★☆☆	E10+	GP.com
Resistance 2	PS3	Sony	★★★★	M	1/09 ▶
Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure	DS	NIS America	★★★★☆	E	10/08
Rise of the Argonauts	Xbox 360	Codemasters	★★★☆☆	M	2/09
Robert Ludlum's The Bourne Conspiracy	PS3, Xbox 360	Sierra Ent.	★★★★	T	8/08
Robocalypse	DS	Tecmo	★★★★☆	E10+	11/08
Rock Band	Wii	MTV Games	★★★★★	T	9/08
Rock Band 2	Xbox 360	MTV Games	★★★★★	T	11/08
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	Wii	Tecmo	★★★☆☆	T	2/09
Samba de Amigo	Wii	Sega	★★★★☆	E	GP.com
Saint's Row 2	Xbox 360	THQ	★★★★☆	M	GP.com ▶
Secret Agent Clank	PSP	Sony	★★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Sega Superstars Tennis	PS3, Xbox 360	Sega	★★★☆☆	E10+	GP.com
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4	PS2	Atlus	★★★★★	T	2/09
Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution	PS3	2K Games	★★★★☆	E10+	8/08
Silent Hill: Homecoming	PS3, Xbox 360	Konami	★★★☆☆	M	11/08
Skate It	Wii	EA Games	★★★★	E	2/09
Smash Court Tennis 3	Xbox 360	Atari	★★★☆☆	E	GP.com
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Confrontation	PS3	Sony	★★★★☆	M	GP.com ▶
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	DS	Sega	★★★★☆	E	11/08
Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	Wii	Sega	★★★☆☆	E	4/08
Sonic Unleashed	Xbox 360	Sega	★★★★☆	E10+	2/09



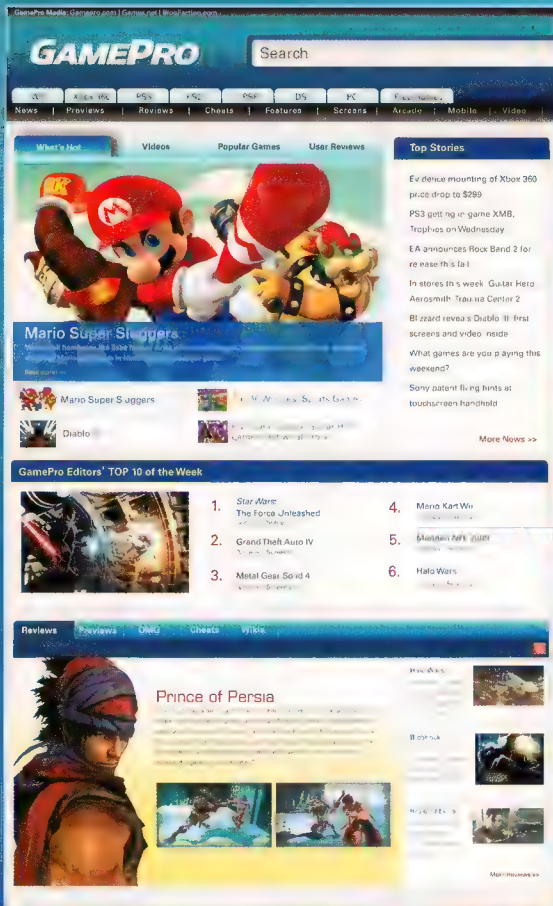
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NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
Soulcalibur IV	PS3, Xbox 360	Namco Ban.	★★★★	T	GP.com
Space Invaders Extreme	PSP	Square Enix	★★★★	E	GP.com
Space Siege	PC	Sega	★★★★	T	GP.com
Speed Racer	Wii	WBIE	★★★★	E	GP.com
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	PS3, Xbox 360	Activision	★★★★	T	GP.com ▶
Spore	PC	EA Games	★★★★	E10+	11/08
Star Ocean: First Departure	PSP	Square Enix	★★★★	T	11/08
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	Wii	LucasArts	★★★★	T	GP.com ▶
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	PS3, Xbox 360	LucasArts	★★★★	T	10/08
Summon Night: Twin Age	DS	Atlus	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	T	5/08
Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix	PS3, Xbox 360	Capcom	★★★★	T	2/09
Tales of Vesperia	Xbox 360	Namco Ban.	★★★★	T	10/08
Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	DS	Tecmo	★★★★	E	GP.com
TNA iMPACT!	Xbox 360	Midway	★★★★	T	GP.com ▶
Tom Clancy's EndWar	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	★★★★	T	12/08
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas 2	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	★★★★	M	6/08
Tomb Raider: Underworld	Xbox 360	Eidos	★★★★	T	1/09
Too Human	Xbox 360	Microsoft	★★★★	T	11/08
Top Spin 3	PS3	2K Sports	★★★★	E	GP.com
Toy Shop	DS	Majesco	★★★★	E	GP.com
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	DS	Atlus	★★★★	T	GP.com
Turok	PS3	Touchstone	★★★★	M	GP.com
Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition	PS2	Sony	★★★★	T	4/08
Ultimate Band	DS	Disney Int.	★★★★	E	GP.com ▶
Universe at War: Earth Assault	Xbox 360	Sega	★★★★	T	GP.com
Valkyria Chronicles	PS3	Sega	★★★★	T	GP.com
Viking: Battle for Asgard	Xbox 360	Sega	★★★★	M	GP.com
Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise	Xbox 360	Microsoft	★★★★	E	11/08
Wacky Races: Crash & Dash	Wii	WBIE	★★★★	E	GP.com
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War—Soulstorm	PC	THQ	★★★★	M	GP.com
Wario Land: Shake It!	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	E	11/08
We Cheer	Wii	Namco Ban.	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
We Love Golf	Wii	Capcom	★★★★	E	GP.com ▶
We Ski	Wii	Namco Ban.	★★★★	E	GP.com
Wild Arms XF	PSP	Xseed	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
Wii Fit	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	E	7/08
Wii Music	Wii	Nintendo	★★★★	E	GP.com
The World Ends With You	DS	Square Enix	★★★★	T	5/08
Worms: A Space Oddity	Wii	THQ	★★★★	E10+	GP.com
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009	Xbox 360	THQ	★★★★	T	GP.com
Yggdrasil Union: We'll Never Fight Alone	PSP	Atlus	★★★★	T	11/08 ▶
Zoo Tycoon 2 DS	DS	THQ	★★★★	E	GP.com



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(7 User Reviews)

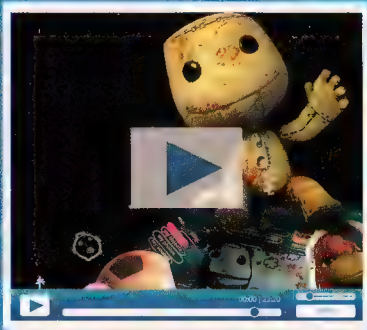


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LETTER OF THE MONTH CONTEST

FIFA Soccer 2009

The February 2009 Letter of the Month winner will receive FIFA Soccer 2009 for the Xbox 360 by EA Sports! Rated E for Everyone by the ESRB.



GAMEPRO, NOVEMBER 2008: GAME GIRLS GONE LAME

From playing Mario and Zelda on the NES, to feeling a sense of accomplishment when executing a beautiful assassination in Assassin's Creed, I have always been an avid gamer. An avid gamer... and a girl. While these terms of often don't mix in gaming society, I like to think that women have slowly been making our way up in the gaming world—I'm even an English major with aspirations of writing video games someday. Yet every once in a while something like the "Game Girls Gone Wild" in your November issue simply rips apart that progress. News flash: Women play video games in their PJs with the occasional junk food just like anyone else. We use less than ladylike language when faced with an obnoxiously difficult level and while we can be dainty, or even sexy, outside of that little gaming zone, we most certainly do not play video games in lingerie. Sorry. So seeing the way that your male writers in a predominantly male-read magazine portrayed female gamers made me feel a little sick and incredibly insulted. Heck, even the questions asked revolved around "What's sexy?" and "Who would you wanna hook up with?" Come on guys, seriously? As much as I used to respect your magazine, I just can't sit by in silence on this behavior. Great job on reviews though. At least that much is still solid. Sarah McGuire—Rochester, NY

As the King of Pop once sang, "You are not alone," Sarah. We received several letters this month from gamers, both male and female, who expressed disappointment in our "Game Girls Gone Wild" feature, two of which are included below. Suffice it to say, we'll be more judicious in the future when walking the line between sex, fiction, and playfulness.



GAME GIRLS GONE LAME (CONT.)



I am not sexist and love that girls play games, but what was up with that three-page feature on "game girls?" The way it was presented was as if it was out of MAXIM magazine. When I read your mag at a younger age, parents sent tons of letters accusing you of having too much violence or too much sex on your pages. Now I think the sex portion may be true. Gamer721—Via Internet

SHOW SOME DECENCY

Today I opened up my November 2008 issue of GamePro and came across your "Game Girls Gone Wild" feature. I was wondering if you could drop the "Game Girls" from your magazine altogether and feature some women with self-respect. A.J.—Boston, MA

Wii GOT YOUR BACK

Why is it that when comparing consoles people don't consider the Wii to be a "hardcore" gaming system? They say the Wii is only for casual gamers, like it's not in the same league as PS3 or Xbox 360. I own a Wii and have played the PS3 and Xbox 360 often and believe all of them can satisfy the needs of dedicated gamers. There are lots of games to play on Wii like Legend of Zelda, Mario Kart, Boom Blox, Okami, No More Heroes, Metroid Prime 3, and others that most gamers love. So just because the Wii invites different people to play doesn't mean it can't be a hardcore system. Alexis Avila—Sterling, VA

Hear, hear, Alexis. Although the last few months have been a bit dry on AAA Nintendo games, there's a deep library of existing hits and even some solid third-party games to be had. It all depends on if you think the glass is half empty or half full.



XBOX 360 WOES WON'T GO AWAY

I have been having serious Xbox 360 troubles. I have had the Red Ring of Death replaced four times, and now I'm having hard drive issues, losing all my saved data. Microsoft said that they would send a new hard drive, but they can never fix the deep, empty hole in my heart. Luke Harkins—Colton, Oregon

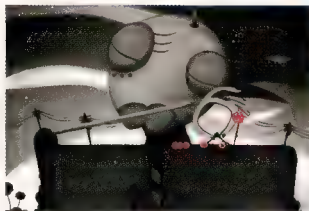
Imagine where Xbox 360 might be today if it weren't for unreliable hardware. "What good are the games if the hardware can't play them?" is a rightful concern of many gamers. Good luck, Luke. You'll need it.



PLAYSTATION 3 LOADING SCREENS FOR 10-YEAR-OLD GAMES?

I recently purchased Street Fighter Alpha on the PlayStation Network and was a little disappointed. The game was an exact copy of the original disc released on the PlayStation way back when, including the loading screen! Why does it still have loading screens after every match? The PS3 is powerful enough to run this game without loading, right? Nicholas Gliss—Via Internet

Sounds like Capcom did a straight port without optimizing the performance for PS3. Hopefully your insightful letter can bring attention to the issue affecting any future downloadable games. Cross your fingers.



WORLD OF GOO IS BLOWING MY MIND

I've been playing World of Goo on Wii and can't get enough. The puzzles, graphics, writing, and music are mind-blowing. For a downloadable game, it's just wrong how much bang for your buck can be found here. Oh, and The Sign Painter is the new GLaDOS, by the way. **Chris Lawson—Fargo, ND**

I couldn't agree more, Chris. If anyone reading this has access to a Wii or PC, do yourself a favor and spend the \$15 necessary to play this game. It's one of my favorite games so far this year for being so fresh and so clean, AAA games included.

MO' GRAPHICS, MO' PROBLEMS

Maybe "good" graphics are only good up to a certain level? In my honest opinion, overly realistic graphics will eventually lead to sucky games, because they typically become insanely complicated and the details you need to notice become minuscule. Granted, I still like me some modern games, but it seems like we've sacrificed a little control for looks, just so video games can be seen more like movies. **Jeff Campbell—Pittsburgh, PA**

While true gaming has become more complex, it's also becoming more accessible. When Cliff Bleszinski, the outspoken designer behind Gears of War, says controllers should have less buttons, you can bet more change is on the horizon as we approach more realistic graphics.



WRATH OF THE LICH NERDS

I am so excited for the Wrath of The Lich King, that I express it vocally. And I was surprised to discover how many people were against not only World of Warcraft but the players as well, referring to my kind as nerds and skill-deprived. Just because the game I play is more expensive and time-consuming doesn't make me an my raid-buddies douches. Does anyone have my back? **WoWNerd2008—Via Internet**

Nerd.

MICROSOFT FUDGING XBOX LIVE NUMBERS?

As an avid player of Xbox Live, I've come across some suspect Gamertags that appear to be inactive. I decided to investigate and it turns out that Microsoft, for whatever reason, doesn't delete old Gamertags. I've sent countless friend requests to people with names that are just words and I have found out that they are silver accounts on the old Xbox. Why wouldn't Microsoft remove inactive accounts. **NCrunch381—Via Internet**

Interestingly, we've never heard of this. Though one might assume that Microsoft is using inactive accounts to inflate the reported 12 million Xbox Live members. We'll sick our gaming gumshoe on the case to see if we can come up with a conclusive story.

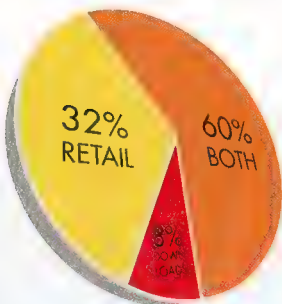
BREAKING IN THE INDUSTRY

I'm a 18 year-old part-time student, and I'm trying to network and "get my feet wet" in the gaming industry. Do you know of any entry level QA/Beta testing positions that are currently available? Is their any advice that you can give me as far as landing a job in this field? Thank you. **Alexander Corey—Chicago, IL**

My recommendation would be to try and apply for a position with Midway, which is a big studio based in your area. I don't know of particular positions, but you should keep bugging them until they give you a starting position. Tell 'em *GamePro* sent ya.

GAMEPRO.COM POLL

What distribution do you prefer?



- Downloads: Discs are lame
- Retail: I like to trade and resell my games
- Both: AAA titles on discs, small games as downloads

I can never resell Spore...it's with me FOREVER...



ASK THE

GAME GIRL

What type of themes do you use on your Xbox 360 dashboard? Would you ever use a manly theme? Rob—Via Internet

Raychul responds:

I like to alternate my Xbox 360 Dashboard theme according to my mood. Most of the time it's just the generic "Glass" background. The theme I switch to the most for a little change of scenery is the latest Gears of War 2 theme. I would definitely use a "guys" theme. Most "guy" stuff like blood and guts or half naked ladies are still fun, so I don't mind.



Send your questions to the Game Girls at GameGirl.com



I THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE "NO MORE HEROES"

I loved No More Heroes on the Wii and was thrilled to learn that Ubisoft announced a sequel at the Tokyo Game Show. Can you spill your guts on the details? Quickfoo100—Via Internet

The game is actually called No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle and is planned for release in January 2010 on Wii. While details are sparse, we know that Travis Touchdown will return to the starring role, and that he'll have a lot of new people to assassinate.

GEARS OF WAR 2 ON PS3?

I've heard rumors that Gears of War 2 might come to PlayStation 3 in addition to Xbox 360. Is that true? Austin Gardner—Columbia, MO

No. Gears of War 2 is published by Microsoft, so unless the company becomes BFF with Sony in the near future, there is no way the game is coming to PS3. It's Xbox 360 or bust on this one.



XBOX 720 AND PS4

My parents said I could get an Xbox 360 for helping them with some home improvement recently, but I worry the system is already nearing the end of its life. Should I wait for "Xbox 720" or "PlayStation 4"? MrX—Via Internet

You could, but don't expect new consoles anytime soon, even if the Xbox 360 is three years-old. True, most generational consoles change every 5 years, and the first Xbox lasted only four, but this generation has turned the half decade life cycle on its head. I say all three consoles have at least 2 to 3 years in them still.



Reader Reviews

Wii Fit (Wii)

Wii Fit is a gleeful hit
By DocBrown

For folks who want to get serious about working out but don't need to see naked old men at the gym, I suggest picking up *Wii Fit*. For \$90, you get another well-designed Nintendo controller, a weighing scale more accurate and eye-catching than the one in your bathroom, as well as a pretty nifty game. The yoga and strength games work well as a starter workout or a supplement to a more rigorous training program. The balance games, particularly ski jumping, are fun to play with others as you try to top each others' scores.

Fun Factor: ★★★★★



INFINITE UNDISCOVERY (Xbox 360)

Infinite what?
By JihadLoe

Square Enix can't be accused of not being consistent. Like *Final Fantasy*, they give you a pretty fun game to play here with corny clichés and an ending not hardly worth the effort. The visuals are awesome and the characters interesting, but the A.I. could have been better. Worse still, there are few surprises. Despite being able to detect the plot like an M. Night Shyamalan movie, *Infinite Undiscovery* does keep you entertained. It may not be the best RPG, but it's also not the worst.

Fun Factor: ★★★★★



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Got a question or comment? Write to us with your name and town via e-mail: letters@gamepro.com or *GamePro*, Head2Head, 501 2nd St., Ste. 114, San Francisco, CA 94107 (Be sure to tell us your city and state, too.) The best letters will be rewarded with publishing bragging rights in future issues of *GamePro*.

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PICK
of the
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Shaquille Robinson
Jonesboro, GA

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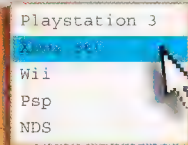
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PARTING SHOT

THE LESS PAINFUL WAY TO SKATEBOARD.



SKATE 2

PS3, Xbox 360

Tear up New San Valadona when Skate 2 hits the streets this month. Skate 2 features twice the amount of tricks that were in the first game, including fingerflips and footplants. You can even get off the board this time around and interact with the environment by moving certain objects to create your trick lines.

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